

Chapter - I
HISTORICAL MILIEU
OF RAMNAD

CHAPTER – I

HISTORICAL MILIEU OF RAMNAD

Pre History

The Ramanad region and its environs furnish several stone artifacts of the pre historic period. The Palaeolithic man appears to have wandered in the region in search of quartzite which was most suitable for him to make stone instruments on which he depended for his security and procurement of food.¹ Certain quartzites of stone instruments have been traced from Ramanathapuram.² In the coastal regions the ridges of granular quartz rock of metamorphic character are available in plenty.³ It perhaps attracted the Paleolithic man to this region. The existence of quartz coupled with the existence of a number of lagoons were factors conducive for the inhabitation of Palaeolithic man. It should be noted here that in the Tirunelveli region a contiguous region, Paleolithic instruments are not to be traced and this can be attributed to the absence of quartz. The nomadic Palaeolithic man, it is inferred, took shelter in natural caves and caverns. Such caves exist in places like Kudimianmalai and Sevavimalai in Pudukkottai which once formed a part of the Ramanathapuram kingdom and now lies immediately next to the borders of the District. The age of pottery and Palaeolithics further gives an insight into the environment in which man lived.⁴

The Palaeolithic Age came to be sub-divided into lower, middle and upper Palaeolithic ages. The Ages were separated from one another by any measurable

¹ Foote, R.B., The Foote Collection of Indian Pre-Historic and Proto-Historic Antiquities, Notes of their Ages and Distribution, Madras, 1916, pp.50-53.

² Ramachandra Dikshitar, V.R., Pre-historic India, 1956, p.45.

³ Logan, A.C., Old Chipped Stone in India, 1906, pp. 17-18.

⁴ Bordes, F., The Old Stone Age, London, 1968, p.40.

length of time.⁵ Often they were found to co-exist or overlap. Broadly speaking there were different stages in the progress of early human history.⁶ At first, man was a food gatherer, then he became a food producer and finally with the urban revolution as a result of the discovery of metals like copper labour became organized, goods were stored and trade developed.⁷The Palaeolithic men in South India were mostly wanderers. They were in constant dread of wild animals. Burial was rather unknown and the dead were exposed to be eaten by wild animals and birds, from the stone scrapers discovered.⁸

Climatic and geological changes drove the pre-historic man from the coastal areas in Ramanathapuram. A coral reef high and dry on Rameshwaram proves to be a comparatively later upheaval. Robert Bruce Foote believes that this reef connected Ramanathapuram (main-land) with Ceylon once. The transformation from the Palaeolithic age to that of Neolithic age was gradual and conclusive in this area. The pre-historic man continued to make Ramanathapuram area his abode in Neolithic age also. In this age man began to use cherts stone for arrow heads, blades and flakes. Such microlithic instruments were found in abundance at Surangudi, a place now lying in the Tirunelveli region on the banks of river Vaipar on the southern border of the Ramanathapuram. Material used in the manufacture of tools was mostly quartz and siliceous stones.⁹

⁵ Mahalingam, T.V., Early South Indian Palaeography, Madras, 1967, p.97.

⁶Foote, R.B., "On the Occurances of Some Implements in Various Parts of Madras and North Arcot District" Madras Journal of Literature and Science Series, III, Madras, 1866, p.13.

⁷ Allchin, B., "The Indian Middle Stone Age" Bullentin of the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, No. II, London, 1959, p.11.

⁸Sarkar, H., Man in India, Vol. XXXI, Ranchi, 1951, No. I, p.23.

⁹Ragunath, S.N., "Late Stone Age Sites near Madurai and Pudukottai", The Eastern Anthropologist 19-1, pp.81-83.

The material found here is heavily stained with red hydrated ferric oxide and consists of chert and quartzite flakes, blades and other such fragments.¹⁰ In the Ramanathapuram region itself Neolithic remains, in the form of burial urns and menhirs have been traced at Manamadurai. These burial sites are pointers to the existence of Neolithic settlements. A number of caves and caverns and others Neolithic monuments have been traced.¹¹ Many Neolithic remains have been traced on the burial sites at Pudukkottai. This area consists of miles and miles of such burial sites usually on river beds. The cairn and the cist type have been found in this area.¹² The Neolithic Age is noted for the beginning of agriculture that became the greatest revolution of the period. Food gatherer became the food producer, agriculture became the main occupation.¹³

These megalithic monuments are usually found on an elevated ground¹⁴ consisting of quartz gravel. The cist is often surrounded by a circle of laterite or granite five to eight feet in diameter. Most of these urns contained small pots and bronze vessels, chank shells and weapons like valaris. In the Neolithic age three types of burials were practiced in this area, namely grave burial, urn burial and burials in sub-terraenean chambers. The Neolithic man disposed of their dead in a better manner. A Neolithic cemetery containing fifty four tombs was discovered in the area of fourteen acres found at Adichanallur in Tirunelveli district.¹⁵

The memory of such burials survived; if not the practice itself up to the 12th or 13th century A.D. and they are referred to in the works of the Tamil poet Ottakuthanar

¹⁰Zenner, F.E. and Allachin, B., "The Microlithic sites of Tirunelveli District" Ancient India, 1956.

¹¹Ramachandra Dikeshitar, V.R., op.cit.,p.72.

¹²Cairn-A barrow made of heaped up rubble stone,Cist:-A grave built of huge stone statues.

¹³ Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, Part I, New York, 1954,p.99.

¹⁴Krishnaswamy, V.D., "Megalithic types-South India" Ancient India,1948.

¹⁵Bishop Caldwell, A History of Tirunelveli, Delhi, 1982, p.14.

(Kulotunga Cholan Ula).¹⁶ In the Sangam work *Manimekhalai* (1st or 2nd century A.D) there is clear reference to the various types of burials.¹⁷ The Megalithic monuments of the Iron Age in the region largely fulfilled a funerary or commemorative purpose and were of a religious nature. They were sepulchral in nature.¹⁸

Early History

The present Ramanathapuram in the early days formed a part of the traditional Marava country. The Marava country also included Pudukkottai, and portions of the present Tiruchiappalli, Madurai and Thirunelveli districts. The Maravas who are found in large numbers in this area seem to have been an indigenous tribe. The numerous references to the Maravas are found in the Sangam works like *Purananuru* and *Silappadhikaram*. It is clear that from very early days they were recognised as a warrior class. The above works allude to their war like qualities.¹⁹ But there is no evidence to show in this group of literature that they ever had a separate and exclusive kingdom of their own in the early days. They refer to them as inhabitants of the *palai* (desert, dry) land, one of the five types of land described in the Sangam literature. Their martial qualities were the result of their struggle for existence in an area where there was little scope for agriculture. Even today Ramanathapuram remains as an area very similar to the *palai* land described in literature.

How the Maravas came to occupy that territory remains as one of the thorny problems of history. The recent theory connects them with the Malavar of ancient Kongunadu. The Sangam works refer to the Malavars as free lances who were among the important races that occupied Tamilnadu, in the first century A.D. In the later

¹⁶Pudukkottai Manual, Vol.No.II-Part I, 1940, pp. 520-525.

¹⁷Suduvor, Iduvor, ThodukulipPaduppar, Thalvidappor, Thaliyirkalipor – Manimekali.

¹⁸Stuart Piggot, Pre-Historic India, London,1962, p.34.

¹⁹Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes in South India, Vol. V, 1909, p.23.

times they moved down into the south into the Pandya and the Chola countries. The Maravas are said to have been one of the branches of the Malavar race.²⁰ *Purananuru* describes a Kongu king of Kuthiraimalai (near Salem) as a Marava.²¹

The present Ramanathapuram was an integral part of the Pandya Kingdom²² and with the declines of that power it began to evolve itself into a separate entity. When the Pandya power was at its zenith, the local chiefs of the area that now belongs to the Ramanathapuram region were administering the territory in a tributary capacity. This fact is amply borne out by the numerous epigraphical evidences, in the form of grants to temples in places like Aruppukkottai, Kovilangulam, Pallimadam, perungurunai and others.²³

There is also a reference to the Pandyas found in an Asokan Edict wherein the Emperor claims to have achieved a moral “Conquest” over the Pandyas²⁴. Megasthenes mentions some special features about the administration of the Pandyan Kingdom in the South.²⁵ This testifies the fact that the Pandyas were definitely in possession of the southern part of the Peninsula during the period of Asoka (273 B.C). *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and *Mahavamsa*, the Ceylonese chronicle, also make mention of the Pandyas.

²⁰Arokiasamy, M., Kongu Country, 1956, pp. 42-43.

²¹Puram 198.

²²Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., The Pandyan Kingdom, 1929, p. 25. “The normal extent of the Pandyan Kingdom in the Sangam Age corresponded to the modern districts of Tinnevely, Ramnad and Madura with the southern velar for its northern boundary”.

²³Rangacharya, V., A Topographical list of inscriptions of Madras Presidency, Vol. II, 1919, pp. 1159-1198.

²⁴He has achieved this moral conquest repeatedly both here and among the people living beyond the borders of his kingdom to the South among the Pandyas. Rock Edict XIII – Mckean, The Edicts of Asoka, 1962, p.27.

But the historian's main stay for the Pandya history is the Sangam works which are generally attributed to the period 100A.D - 250 A.D.²⁶ Epics like the *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekalai*, works of moderate length like *Maduraikanchi*, and shorter works like *Purananuru*, *Akananuru* and *Paripadal*, have been classified as Sangam works.²⁷ The Velvikudi and Sinnamanur grants fill up a few of the gaps in history and helps us to obtain a somewhat cogent picture of the period.

The earliest Pandya king mentioned in the Sangam works is Mudukkudumi. He seems to have been an ardent patron of Vedic cults like Yagnas that he eventually acquired the prefix Palyagasalai (patron of many sacrificial halls). He was succeeded by Nedunchezhan, the hero of the battle of Talayalanganam. From the frequent mention of his name in *Maduraikanchi* the Sinnamanur plates and many other anthologies, it is surmised that Nedunchezhan was one of the outstanding monarchs in the family of the early Pandyas. Soon after his accession while still very young, he successfully met the combined forces of the Cholas and the Cheras and repelled them. His policy of aggressive expansion extended the Pandya borders further. The last of the early Pandyas was Ugraperuvaludi or Ugrapandya. It was during his reign that the Kalabhras invaded the country.

There are diverse opinions on the Kalabhra invasion and on their identity. It is said that they, having got dislodged by the Kadambas from their earlier home in the confines of Saravana Belogola moved further east and set up a kingdom which included the modern Bangalore, Kolar and the Chittor districts and this area came to be called Kalavna. From there they pushed themselves into the Chola and the Pandya

²⁶Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., op.cit., pp. 36,81-82.

²⁷Ramachandra Dikshitar, V.R., Studies in Tamil Literature and History, 1929, pp.17.

Kingdoms and overthrew the Tamil Monarchies.²⁸ It was only in the sixth century Pandyas were able to rise up under Kodungon and wrenched their country from the Kalabhra grip. The three centuries that followed the Pandya restoration have been called the Age of the First Empire. Though there are a number of sources of information for this period viz., Velvikudi grants, the smaller Sinnamanur Plates, the larger Sinnamanur plates, the Madras Museum plates of Jatavarman, the Anamalai stone inscriptions and the AiyvarMalai inscriptions, they are lacking in details with regard to the political history of the period. But a coherent geneological list is obtained for the period starting from the end of Kalabhra rule, 590 A.D.to 920A.D.

Kodungon (590-620 A.D) who effected the Pandya restoration subdued his rival claimants and paved the way for along and firm Pandya rule. His son Maravarman Avanisulamani (620-645 A.D.) maintained his patrimony intact and bequeathed it to his son and successor Jayantavarman (Sendan) himself adding little to it. The growing might of the Pandyas was given expression to by Sendan's (A.D.645-670) success over his Chera contemporary. The next ruler was ArikesariParankusaMaravarman (670-700), whose reign marked the beginning of a protracted conflict with the nascent Pallava power in the northern part of Tamilnadu. The Paravasof the Pandya coast were taken to task by him for their intransigence. He worsted the Chera ruler in a number of battles and the conflict culminated in the great battles at Nannilam, where again the Pandya emerged.Arikesari was also victorious over the Kerala king and he captured him with his near relatives and forces. By virtue of his matrimonial alliance with the Chola royal family, he was able to add some more territory to his kingdom. The kingdom ArikesariParankusaMaravarman handed down to his son Koccadaiyan was larger and more powerful than the one he inherited.

²⁸Venkataraman, E.R., "A note on the Kalabhras", Paper read before the Arohaeological Society of the South India, on 20th December 1958.

Koccadaiyan also known as Ranadhira (700-730 A.D) during his reign, undertook a punitive expedition against the Ayelir, a mountain chief, who was ruling the hilly country between modern Tirunelveli and Trivandrum. Marudur (which may be Thirupudai) was the venue of his encounter with the chieftain. Koccadaiyan was succeeded by his son Maravarman Rajasimha I (730-765 A.D.) who is accredited with victories over his contemporary, Pallava Nandivarman and Kongu rulers. He continued his father's policy of territorial aggrandizement and brought Malakongam in the region of the present Thanjavur District, within the Pandayan fold. The Pandyan kingdom extended up to Kodumudi in the Kongunad.²⁹

The Malava king who was reduced to subjection by Rajasimha I gave his daughter in marriage to the Pandyan king.³⁰ The successor on the throne Nedunjadayan (765-815 A.D.), the son and successor of Rajasimha I, also constantly strove to push the borders of his kingdom further and in the process came into conflict with the Kongu ruler and the King of Venad. The Pandyan kingdom at the time of his death extended beyond the modern Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur, Salem and Coimbatore districts. JatilaParantaka's son, Srimara Sri Vallabha proved a true son of the great father by worsting a formidable confederacy of Gangas, Pallavas, Cholas and Kalingas at Kudamuku (Kumbakonam). Ceylon had to acknowledge his supremacy after a crushing defeat and her ruler Sena I (831-851) fled. "Sena II counter invaded the Pandyan Country and took possession of the capital, crowned the Pandya king who had sought his help and returned to Ceylon. The traditional dates of Sena I and Sena II are A.D.846 to 866 and A.D. 866 to 901. We have assigned to Srimara roughly A.D.815 to 862 so that the counter invasion from Ceylon could fall in the reign of the successor of Srimara. But it is not possible to accept the arrangement if

²⁹Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., History of South India, 1958, p.180.

³⁰Majumdar, R.C., The Classical Age, 1954, p.268.

we propose to identify the Pandya prince who appealed to Sena II and the Mayapandya who was conquered by Srimara. It has been pointed out that a correction of twenty four years must be introduced in to Mahavamsha chronology of this period in the light of the established dates of South Indian History with reference to the early Cholas of the Vijayala line. This correction would give the dates A.D.822 to 842 and A.D 842 to 877 roughly for the reigns of Sena I and Sena II and thus reconcile the chronology of the narrative in the *Mahavamsha* with that of Srimara's reign as fixed by independent evidence. Srimara however was not destined to be an all conquering soldier for he was defeated eventually by Pallava Nandivarman III (844-866) at Tellaru near Wandivash. The Pandyas lost much of his territory, since the victorious Pallava marched as far as Vaigai. The next ruler VaragunaVarma (862-880) had to face the confederate forces of the Pallavas, Cholas and the Gangas at Thiruppurampayam and was defeated. The success of the enemies at this period retarded the growth of the Pandya power. Soon after the battle VaragunaVarma died, childless. He was succeeded by his brother Sri Parataka alias Viranarayana. He had to defend himself from the neighbouring kings including the ruler of Kongunad who threatened to overpower him. His son Maravarman Rajasimha II was the next ruler. During his reign ParantakaChola I, sought to crush the Pandya power, to forstall him Rajasimha took the offensive with the help of Kassapa V ruler of Ceylon, who sent an army and invaded the Chola country. The issue was decided at the battle of Velur in the Chola's favour and the victorious Chola forced promptly occupied Madurai, while Rajasimha. II fled to Ceylon, crest fallen from where he crossed over to Chera country. The occupation of Madurai by the Chola forces heralded the Chola domination of the Pandya country that was to last for three centuries.

The Chola Domination

The Pandyas did not get acquiesced to the Chola overlordship and were in a perpetual state of revolt. Marava country was the venue of many battles between the Cholas and the Pandyas who were trying to unyoke themselves from the Imperial Cholas. The Cholas were also particular about controlling the passage to Ceylon which was in the Marava country.

Parantaka Chola, however, was too pre-occupied with his enemies from the northern side viz, the Rashtrakutas (Krishna III) to make any efforts to consolidate his gains in the Pandya country. After defeating the Cholas, Krishna III, marched across the Marava country and erected a pillar of victory at Rameshwaram.³¹ After the death of Parantaka Chola, Virapandya defeated his successor, probable Gandaraditya and claimed independence. In this attempt the Pandyas were supported by the Ceylon ruler Mahinda IV. Sundara Chola Parantaka II (957-973), the successor of Gandaraditya desired to reimpose Chola authority on Pandya country and defeated Virapandya in two battles. In the second battle Virapandya was found in the Ramanathapuram region.³² Though Sundara Chola brought the Pandya Kingdom again into the Chola fold, it was only during the reign of Raja Raja Chola that their position was consolidated. Early in his reign, the rulers of Pandya, Kerala and Ceylon joined together against Rajaraja. In two campaigns, Rajaraja vanquished the Pandyas and the Kerala kings by attacking them at Kandalur and Viliyam. In the third campaign he overran the northern part of Ceylon and forced the ruler Mahinda V to flee. Ceylon was made a Chola province with Polonnaruwa (Pulavannur) as the capital. Pandya country was also made a Chola province and Rajaraja appointed one of his sons as the Viceroy of the Province. Madurai being the headquarters of the Viceroyalty, Pandya

³¹Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., op.cit., p.172.

³²Epigraphic Indica, p. 280.

country was henceforth known as Rajaraja Chola Mandalam. Rajaraja used the Marava country as a spring board from whence he could conduct his devastating raids on the island, Ceylon. Rajendra Chola (1012-1044) appointed his son as viceroy to the Pandya country with the title Chola Pandya. The royal control over the provinces was both firm and regular. But during his tenth regional year, the Pandyas maintained cordial relationship with the Ceylon rulers who were also victims of the Chola imperialism. Rajadhiraja, the son of Rajendra led an expedition against Vikramabahu, the ruler of Ceylon and defeated him; Rajendra was succeeded by his son Rajadhiraja I (1044). Almost every one of the Chola kings who ruled between the period of Rajendra I and Rajendra II had to defeat the Pandyas afresh and re-impose their authority. Perhaps Sundarapandya was the moving spirit behind all such risings against the Cholas.³³ During the reign of Kulothunga I, who ascended the throne in 1070 A.D., the Pandya dynasty taking advantage of the administrative anarchy that followed Kulotunga's accession, tried to assert themselves. Ultimately they not only defied the Cholas, but considerably undermined their authority. Jatavarman Sri Vallabha, one of the descendants of the earlier Pandyas seen to have been the person who restored the Pandyas, greatness. A considerable number of inscriptions of his period are still extant in the Ramanathapuram region.³⁴ The abundant references in these inscriptions to canal sluices, water bunds and other irrigational facilities attributed to the benevolent reign of Parakrama Pandya and to the grain measure named 'Vira Pandya' testify that Parakrama Pandya and Virapandiya were the two predecessors of Jatavarman Sri Vallabha or his co-regents who contributed much to the

³³Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., *The Cholas*, 1935-An inscription at Pallimadam in Ramanathapuram refers to him.see Ramachari's *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency*, Vol.II, 1919.

³⁴An inscription in acave temple at Kunnakkudi, a village in the TiruppatturTaluk of the Ramanathapuram District refers to his name-see Ramachari, *op.cit.*,Vol.II, 1919,p.1185.

development of agriculture.³⁵ The Hoysalas with the instigation of the Cholas marched southwards towards Rameshwaram. Vishnuvardhan, the Hoysala General fought at least one battle with the troops of the Pandyas of Madurai. However, no permanent results were achieved.

Pandyas of the Second Empire

Though Jatavarma Sri Vallabha suffered a defeat in the hands of Kulotunga Chola, he continued to rule independently though with a diminished strength. He was succeeded by Maravarma Thirpuvana Chakravarthi Parakrama Pandya who is known to have been reigning in 1060-61, was a contemporary of Kulotunga CholaI. This Pandya successfully defied any further imposition of Chola authority. This fact is evidenced by an inscription found on the South wall of the Central Shrine in the Sundareswara temple at Aruppukkottai, Ramanathapuram region.³⁶The next ruler Jatavarma Parantaka, followed a policy of expansion. He defeated the rulers of Chera and south Kalinga Countries and annexed these areas to the Pandyan kingdom.

In 1170, the Pandya country became the scene of a fierce and protracted internal warfare which arose on account of a disputed succession to the throne. Parakrama Pandya and Kulasekara were the two claimants to the Pandya throne. The ruler of Ceylon, Parakramabahu played an important role in this war. When Parakrama Pandya realised that his claim to the throne was challenged by Kulasekara he made a frantic appeal to Parakramabahu who with great alacrity agreed to help. But before a force could be despatched from Ceylon, Kulasekara overpowered Parakrama Pandya, captured him with his family and put all of them to death assuming the title, Pandyan Emperor, he ascended the throne at Madurai.

³⁵Duncan, J. Derrtt, M., The Hoysalas, Madras 1957, pp. 52-53.

³⁶Rangachari, V., Inscriptions of Madras Presidency, Vol.11.1919, p.1159.

Invasion from Ceylon

A powerful force was dispatched under the famous General Lankapura Dandanatha. Only when the army reached Mahatittha (manhot) from the capital the information about Kulasekara's audacity was received Parakramabhahu ordered the continuation of his plans so that the kingdom might be wrenched from Kulasekara and given to Parakrama Pandya's son. After a voyage lasting a day and a night the Ceylonese army sighted the coast and effected a landing in spite of opposition at Talabilla, then a thriving port on the Pandya Coast.³⁷

Lankapura, after a number of battles in which the Pandya forces were routed, captured Rameshwaram. He marched down to the place which now goes by the name Pamban and a haven named Kundukala fell in his hands.³⁸ He also attacked and defeated a local chieftain, Alavanda Perumal who was then camping at the village Vadah.³⁹ Realising the magnitude of the danger to the throne, Kulasekara gathered all the forces he could muster and attacked the Ceylon General in his camp. In a hotly contested battle, Lankapura utterly routed the Pandya forces, perused and burnt their camp. Lankapura then occupied Vadah (Vedakau) and from there launched a surprise attack on Deivyapattinam (Devipattinam as it is now called) and from there marched to Siriyavala. After his successful march he returned by way of Kalaiyarkoil-Paramakudi road and took two places Anivalakkotta and the fortress of Nettur.⁴⁰ Lankapura made these two places the headquarters of his activity. At this stage, information reached

³⁷ This place is identified with Puliyadisalai, two miles east of Gandamdana Parvata, near the town of Rameswaram. It is interesting to note the local tradition about a Kandyan Monarch who built the santum –sanctorum of Rameswaram temple. This is evidenced by certain inscriptions in the sanctum itself. This ruler of Ceylon brought all the stones required for the building from Ceylon itself. The ships carrying the hewn stones landed at Talabilla and from there the stones were carried to the site of construction, since in the island Rameswaram itself proper stone was not to be found. The unused stones are still said to be in the harbour at Puliyadisalai.

³⁸ This place is now known as Kundugal and is just two miles south of Pamban. This place is now used by the Southern Railway as both dry and wet docks for the repair of these steam launches.

³⁹ Vedalai, 2 miles south-west of mantapam Camp Railway Station.

⁴⁰ Nettur is about five miles west of Ilaiyangudi and may be about seven or eight miles north-west of Paramagudi Railway Station.

Lankapura, that Vira Pandya, son of Parakrama Pandya had taken refuge in the Malavan country. Sending the information on to his master Parakramabhahu in Ceylon, Lankapura marched on to Periakulam and captured Melamangalam and Kilamangalam. But he handed over these places back to the respective chieftains and returned to his headquarters. From there he proceeded to Manavira Madurai (Manamadurai) and defeated the chieftains who held the place. Then he marched on to Anjukottai near Tiruvadanaï and took the place and also the two ports in the vicinity of Tondi and Pasipattanam. From there Lankapura moved on further to Kurundangudi and then to Tiruvekamba (perhaps the present Tiruvengampattur).⁴¹ The chieftain of the place, Malava Chakravarthi, resisting the intrusion and refusing to submit, retired to Semponmari in the Tiruppattur Taluk (Ramanathapuram District). Lankapura then advanced upon Semponmari, took it within half a day. The Pandyan country up to the Chola country borders thus came under the sway of this intrepid islander, Lankapura. The Vaisyas (Vessas) and Muhammadans of the place brought presents to him. He returned to his headquarters. At this juncture, another rival chieftain dispossessed Malava Chakravarthi of Siriyavala (Siruvayal). Lankapura intervened and effected a conciliation between the two. He then, in order to win the good will of the people, set about restoring two tanks that were in a dilapidated condition at Rajasinha Mahala (Rajasinga Mangalam) and Valugama (Valugrama, Valandaravai).

Thus for a time the whole of Marava country from Rameshwaram to Tiruppattur came under the sway of Lankapura. From the references to this invasion in *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhalese epic, it would appear that Lankapura really had effective control over the areas he conquered. His intervention in the

⁴¹ Krishnaswamy Iyengar, S., South India and her Muhammadan Invaders, 1921. p.7.

MalavaChakravarthi's dispute and his order to restore the two tanks also support this view.

Kulasekara, meanwhile, had regained his poise and with a strong force he had recruited from the Kongu and Thenpandinadu (Tirunelveli) challenged Lankapura. The king of Ceylon, Parakramabahu in order to strengthen the hands of his General, despatched another force under the generalship of Jagad Vijaya. He landed in the Marava country and established his headquarters at Anivalakki. Lankapura set out and fought an indecisive battle at Mangalam. He pushed forward to Siruvayal and there defeated a confederacy of the local chieftains under the leadership of Punkonda Nadalavar and burnt down his two storeyed palace. Meanwhile JagadVijaya, the other General, had marched west towards Manavira Madura (Manamadurai) and had taken a number of places and returned to Nettur. The two armies made a combined advance, against Kulasekara. Kulasekara, by then, had moved down to the city of Rajina (unidentified still). The Ceylonese forces gained a thumping victory over the Pandyas and city fell in their hands. Kulasekara fled to the country of the Tondaman⁴² and appealed to the Cholas for armed assistance. This marked the end of the first part of the campaign of the Ceylonese Generals.

Lankapura then marched towards Madurai and installed his candidate Vira Pandya on the throne. Having achieved his main aim he began to chase Kulasekara. He proceeded to Tiruppattur along the main road from Madurai. Having captured Tiruppattur, he chased the garrison from there. Ponnamaravathi was next to fall and there he made known to the public by beat of drums that his intention was to protect the local populace. He returned to Madurai and obeying the imperial behest from Ceylon, began to make elaborate arrangements to celebrate the coronation of Vira

⁴²Perhaps the chieftains of Andaman who had this title prior to the rise of PudukkottaiTondaman.

Pandya. He appointed three chieftains from the Marava country, Malava Chakkaravarti Malavarayar and Talaiyur Nadalvar to perform the duties of Lambakanna.⁴³ All the vassal rulers of the Pandyas were also invited so as to renew their allegiance.

Kulaskara, meanwhile, succeeded in getting help from the Tondaman and with the vast forces which were thus left at his disposal, he poured down on the Marava country and captured Mangalam in the Sattur region. He immediately fortified the place. In the same flush of victory, he captured Srivilliputtur. Then he collected a vast force from Tirunelveli, added to it by armies of the two Kongus, his allies took possession of the fortress of Santeneri.⁴⁴ But the Ceylon General again defeated the Pandyas.

The Chola monarch Rajadhiraja grew sympathetic towards the Pandyas and sent a force under the command of a chief named Pallavaraya by sea to Tondi and Pasi. Lankapura, getting inkling of the Chola forces marched from Kalaiyarkoil where he was then camping, to Kilamilar in the Tirumayam Taluk. In the battle that took place near Kilamilar, the allied forces failed to overpower Lankapura. Then the Ceylon forces, with their two generals, embarked to Ceylon. Lankapura ordered Vira Pandya to use 'Kahapana', a Ceylonese coin, with the superscription of 'Parakramabahu', in the Pandya country. The Chola inscriptions, however, state that the Ceylonese generals suffered a severe defeat in the hands of the Cholas and that it was this defeat that warranted their departure.⁴⁵ Prof. Nilakanta Sastri observes that this account of the Ceylonese victory is very one-sided. For, the Ceylonese generals

⁴³These three men belonged to the Lambakanna class. The office meant the chief ship of the Lambakannas (Those who have pendent ear-lobes).

⁴⁴ This is identified as a place called Santeneri in the inscriptions of the Ramanathapuram Taluk.

⁴⁵Annual Report of Epigraphy, No.20 of 1899, South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.I.No,456.

are said to have given presents to several chiefs in the Pandya country and these look like bribes offered to win them over, from their allegiance to Kulasekara.⁴⁶

Thus the success against Kulasekara was not always won on the field of battle. And especially after the Chola intervention, it would seem that the Ceylonese troops actually lost ground and sustained defeats and it might be suspected that the evacuation of the Pandya country by Lankapura was not an entirely voluntary retirement.

Even after so many set backs Kulasekara continued to fight. But before he could finish his task death intervened. His son Vikrama Pandya carried on the fight and with the help of the Chola King, Kulotunga III. Ousted Vira Pandya from the throne and firmly established himself as the ruler.

The Ceylonese occupation of the Marava country lasted for a few years only. Even to-day there is signs of this in the Marava country. The Ceylonese general Lankapura has immortalised his name by his interest in works of peace reflected in his repairs to temples, tanks and construction of roads. The invasion must have made a deep impression in the minds of the people. Even to-day the local legends are full of stories, some of them fantastic about the Ceylonese occupation. Ceylonese coins are picked up every now and then from a particular site, on which it is said, stood the city Parakrama Pattinam built at the command of Parakramabahu.

Later Pandyas

During that period there were more than one Pandya but all of them owed their allegiance to the Pandya of Madurai. After the restoration also, the Marava country formed a part of the Pandya Empire. Marco Polo refers to this fact in his travelogues. The numerous inscriptions found in the Ramanathapuram region testify the fact that

⁴⁶Nilakanta Sasiri, K.A., The Colas, Volume II, Part I, 1937, p.100.

the Marava country was under the Pandya rule till 1311 when Malik Kafur invaded Madurai.

Vikrama Pandya was succeeded by Jatavarma Kulasekara I who reigned from A.D.1190 to 1216. In A.D.1216, Maravarma Sundara Pandya (1216-1238) came to the throne. He won brilliant victories over the Cholas and captured considerable territory of the Cholas. His successor was Maravarman Sundara Pandya (1255-1268). Jatavarma was a great soldier and was able to dictate terms to the Cholas, Cheras and the Hoysalas. The Pallavas also bowed to his rule. The ruler of Ceylon gave his daughter in marriage to this Pandya so as to win his good will. The Yadavas of Devagiri also fell victims to his sword.

Maravarma Kulasekara, the next ruler ascended the throne in 1268 reigned till 1311.⁴⁷ During his reign the four princes, namely, JatavarmaSundara Pandiya II, MahavarmaVikrama Pandya, JatavarmaVira Pandya II and Jatavarma Sundara Pandya III who came to the power in 1276, 1286, 1296 and 1303 respectively co-operated with him in the administration of the empire. It was in his period that Marco Polo visited Tamilnadu in A.D.1292. Besides, Wassaf, a Muslim historian has also left an account of the kingdom. *Mahavamsa* of Ceylon refers to a Pandya invasion of Ceylon during his period.

Muslim Invasion

After Maravarma Kulasekara's death, the Pandya kingdom was plunged into a fratricidal war which ultimately warranted the ruin of the kingdom. The two claimants to the throne were Jatavarma Sundara Pandya III, the legitimate son of the former king and JatavarmaVira Pandya, the illegitimate son of the same ruler. When Vira Pandya, overpowered Sundara Pandya and occupied the throne, the latter appealed to

⁴⁷Majumdar, R.C., The Delhi Sultanate, Bombay, 1960, pp.230-244.

Malik Kafur, the General of the Delhi Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilji, who was then on a plundering expedition to the south.

Sundara Pandya's appeal gave Malik Kafur an excuse for an invasion and he marched down to Dindigul. He marched by road to Periakulam as far as Vathalagundu. From there he marched upon Madurai, and occupied it without any resistance as Vira Pandya had already fled. Madurai was made a victim of the vandalism of the Sultan's army. The Muslim force then marched across the Marava country, leaving desolation in its wake and arrived at Rameshwaram. The ports near Rameshwaram contained considerably large Mohammedan population and Amir Kusru in his work *Ashika* refers to this fact. From the evidences available, it is surmised that he founded either at Rameshwaram itself or on the main land, a mosque which he named after his master Ala-ud-din Khiliji. There is also a different view expressed by Prof.K.A. NilakantaSastri. He holds that the invasion of Malik Kafur did not take place on the appeal of the Pandyan claimant to the throne but quite independent of it.⁴⁸

After leaving two garrisons one at Madurai and another one at Kannanur, capital of Hoysalas⁴⁹ to maintain the Sultan's hold over the conquered territories he returned to Delhi. The Pandyas retired from Madurai once for all. However, it should be remembered that the occupation of Madurai at best, meant only the occupation of Madurai at and its immediate confines and not the whole of Pandya kingdom. A power which had thoroughly alienated the sympathy of the local population by its religious fanaticism revealed in its iconoclasm and pillage, could not hope to be the heirs to the Pandya Empire. Thus the Marava country, but for the havoc wrought by

⁴⁸Majundar, R.C., The Struggle for Empire, Bombay, 1957, p.259.

⁴⁹Now a suburb of Samayapuram, 9 miles north of Tiruchirappalli.

the forces of Malik Kafurre mained unaffected by the Muslim invasion and the rule of hereditary chieftains continued.

The Madurai Sultanate

The Sultans of Delhi continued to rule Madurai through their viceroys till 1334. Sayyid Jalal-ud-din Ahsan Shah, viceroy of Muthammad-bin-Tughlak, defied the Sultan and declared himself independent. But he was not destined to enjoy the fruits of his cavalier act for long, for in the year 1339, an officer of the garrison Ala-ud-din Udanji Shah by a carefully planned coup-de-etat established himself in the throne, killing the former ruler in the process. His rule lasted for only two years. The next ruler Qutb-ud-din.Firuz Shah was slain after 40days reign and Ghiyas –ud –din Mohammed Damaghan Shan, the brother in-law of the well known chronicler Ibn-Battuta, became the next ruler. He was constantly engaged in war with the Hoysala monarch Vira Ballala III.⁵⁰ In 1342, he trounced the forces of the Hoysala monarch in abattle and the captured Raja was flayed alive. A fortnight later, the Sultan was poisoned. He was succeeded by Nasir-ud-din-Mohammed Gayal Damaghan Shah. It is recorded that this ruler paid a visit to China. His rule was followed by the reigns of three Sultans successively Adil Shah, Fakir-ud-din Mubarakshah, and Ala-ud-din Sikkandar Shah till 1378 and the whole period was apparently uneventful.

The Vijayanagar Empire

After ViraBallala III's death the officers of the last two Ballalas carried on their fight with remarkable tencity. One of the officers was Bukka and his son, Prince

⁵⁰ ViraBallala III joined Kapaya Nayakka with the avowed object of restoring Hindu Dharma and free the south from the Muslim domination. In spite of the best efforts of the Sultans they freed the Kakatya Kingdom. He also struck at the Mohammedan Sultanate of Delhi. His successor carried on his struggle to ultimate victory. According to S. KrishnaswamyIyengar it is he “who made it possible for the South Indian Hindus to be the Hindus they are to day”.

Kumara Kampana, wrenched Madurai from the Mohammedans. The date of Kampana's conquest of Madurai is generally taken as 1358.⁵¹ Probably Kumara Kampana was declared the viceroy of the Vijayanagar Empire, the foundation stone for which was laid thirty years ago on the banks of the Tungabadhra by his father Bukka, and Harihara. Kampana vigorously tried to restore order. For the years following Kampana viceroyalty there is not much of information available. The viceroyalty of Madurai again came into prominence during the reign of Thevaraya II (A.D.1419-1449) the emperor of Vijayanagar. He appointed Lakkana, an officer of the court as viceroy of Madurai who carried on the administration with the help of a deputy. He was given the title "the Lord of the Southern Ocean" which indicates that the Marava country, perhaps including Rameshwaram, was under the control of the Madurai Viceroy in the first half of the 15th century. During the reign of Saluva Narasimha, beginning with 1490, Narasa Naik, a general of Vijayanagar was sent to Tirunelveli to quell some disaffection of the feudatories. During the period emperor Vira Narasimha, the next ruler who ruled till 1509, the Madurai country deteriorated into a reign of warring chieftains, struggling against each other. It was left to Emperor Krishna Thevaraya (1509-1530) to bring Madurai firmly under the control of Vijayanagar. He sent Nagama to enforce order in the southern most province of the empire. Nagama after accomplishing his task showed signs of resistance against the emperor. But his rebellion was put down and the authority of the emperor was re-imposed by Viswanatha, Nagamma's son in 1529.

Viswanatha Nayakka (1529-1564)

The Marava country, with the fall of the Madurai Sultanate passed under the Vijayanagar Empire. This fact is amply borne out by the Mrtynjaya manuscripts

⁵¹Sathianatha Iyer, R.,The History of the Nayakas of Madurai.", Introduction, 1924, p.7.

which say “the extent of the country acquired was from Uttatur (Urratur) and Valikondapuram on the north, even to Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin) on the south: to Covambutur (Coimbatore), Irodu (Erode), Tarapuram (Dharapuram) and Mela Mali (Mela Malai), Western Ghats on the west and Ramisseram on the east (Rameshwaram).”⁵²

Due to the transfer of central authority, for a short while the Marava country became the scene of disaffection, so Viswanatha had to undertake an expedition against the Kambam, Gudalur chief, who ceased paying tribute. The Nayak forces were led by Ramabadhra Nayak who successfully stormed the fort at Kambam and reduced the country to submission.

Nelson and Rangachari are of the opinion that Viswanatha and his able minister Dalavoy Ariyanathar ruled Marava country through two commissioners. But this administrative experiment soon failed. Even then during the reigns of the next three rulers, Krishnappa Nayakka II (1564-1572), Virappa Nayakka (1572-1595) and Krishnappa Nayakka II (1595-1601), no attempt was made to restore order in the Marava country. It was Muthu Krishnappa Nayakka (1601-1609) who effected the settlement of the Marava Country.

There were three factors that motivated Muthu Krishnappa to effect the much needed settlement. The first and foremost was of political nature. The earlier Nayaks seem to have left the east region, especially the Tirunelveli coast to foreign enterprise. During the rule of the Pandyas, the Arabs had come and settled down in places like Kayalpattinam and Kilakkarai (in Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram region respectively). By the middle of the 16th century the Portuguese had established themselves in Tuticorin, Vaipar and Punnaikayal. Francis Xavier landed in Tirunelveli

⁵²Oriental Historical Manuscripts, Vol. II, p.117.

coast in 1542 and carried on a hectic proselyting campaign. The Nayaks of Madurai to begin with, were rather indifferent to the happenings on the south coast. Meanwhile the Portuguese, with the co-operation of Paravas, who converted to Christianity, established what can be termed as a Portuguese overseas province. They took over the civil and criminal administration of the fishery coast without getting prior sanction from any native potentate. Francis Xavier spoke of Paravas as “Subjects of His Portuguese Majesty”.⁵³

However, gradually the Nayaks began to feel the irksomeness of the presence of a foreign power near their territory. To counteract the influence of this foreign power Muthu Krishnappa Nayakka decided to establish a strong power near the Portuguese establishments.

The second factor, though economic, was also equally important. The Portuguese began to benefit by all the dues and revenues of the coastal area. More than anything else the revenue from the pearl fisheries went a long way in enriching their treasury. The Nayakrulers felt this loss of revenue. They thought that a strong power in the neighbourhood of the Portuguese territory would be a safeguard against their further extension. A religious factor was also there as a cause for the settlement of the Marava country. Since the failure of Viswanatha’s administrative experiment, the whole of Marava country once again lapsed into disorder. The chieftains warred against each other. There was an intense unrest and anarchy all over the region. As a result of the prevailing confusion the route to Rameshwaram became unsafe due to their being infested with a number of waylayers. The pilgrims constantly petitioned to the ruler, the Nayak, to make the road safe for travellers.

⁵³Bishop Caldwell, History of Tirunelvely, 1881, p.71.

Muthu KrishnappaNayakka's first step in effecting the settlement of the Marava country was the deputation of Sadaika Deva Udayan Sethupathi to restore order in the Marava country.⁵⁴ The date of these events is said to be 1605. This date is likely to be correct as the first Sethupathi inscription of the period belongs to 1607. It is probable that the rebellious chiefs and was also given a free hand in dealing with the chiefs, on agreeing to pay affixed tribute. He first appears to have fortified Ramanathapuram and Pogalur and arranged armed escorts to the pilgrims. The turbulent chiefs of the surrounding country were subdued and a strong Government was established at Kalaiyarkoil, Pattamangalam and other places. Thus, the Sethupathi proved his capacity to deal effectively with the situation and won the favour of the Nayak. He also increased the Nayak's revenue. Muthu Krishnappa Nayakka was well pleased with the Sethupathi and the appointed Sadaika Deva sprinkling the water of Ganges on his head and gave him the insignia of dignity.⁵⁵ Sethupathi started ruling the Marava country with the relegated authority.

The Poligar chieftains

Among the Poligar chieftains of South India the Sethupathi of Ramnad held a predominant position by virtue of their heroic and adventurous exploits. The Poligar chieftains who once regulated and decided the events in the courts of Hindus as well as Muslim kings for more than three centuries were destined to face a total extinction from the political horizon of South India following the establishment of British supremacy. The fag end of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of uprisings in the southern parts of the Indian peninsula against British supremacy. The poligar chieftains who represented the feudal vassals

⁵⁴Krishnaswamy Iyengar, S., op.cit., p.92.

⁵⁵Rajaram Rao, T., Manual of the Ramnad Samasthanam, Madura, 1891, p.216.

in South India mostly led the upheavals. Subsequent to the defeat and destruction of Tippu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, the English undertook drastic measures to annihilate the auxiliary chieftains. When the English restored to certain stringent measures to occupy their vast estates and to relieve their militia, some of the local chieftains offered valiant resistance and most of them attained martyrdom

Following the brutal suppression of the poligar chieftains, the banner of resistance was lifted up by the native soldiers who once served under the chieftains. Till the introduction of Wellesley's controversial system of subsidiary alliances, the defensive and offensive operations were largely entrusted to the native forces. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the native militia played a vital role in the political and administrative transactions of the local rulers. Generally almost all the competent persons irrespective of their caste, religions and other sectarian differences, who aspired for service in the military, were recruited to the army. In South India the local soldiers were known different names. The military establishment contained three categories of soldiers among the poligar chieftains. They were *amarum peons*, the *catabudi peons* and the *mercenary peons*. The first two groups were paid chiefly in land and last one in cash and grain. The *amarum peons* exercised the right on the land on hereditary basis and always remained prepared to execute the orders of the kings.⁵⁶

The *catabudi peons*, extended military service and they were paid by assignments of wastelands in lieu of pecuniary wages.⁵⁷ They served the poligars with pikes and matchlocks at their expense and made restitution of any property plundered within the villages, entrusted to their care. The *mercenary peons* were recruited only in times of emergency. During times of military operation the armed men received subsistence in money and grain, exclusive of the traditional privileges. Those peons

⁷² Political Consultations, Vol. 118, Ff. 2688-90.

⁷³ Selection from the Records of the Bellary District, F.74.

were left at the complete disposal of the concerned poligars. They received orders directly from the poligars. When a poligar commanded them, they executed his orders murder and robbery as mere matters of duty for which he alone was responsible. ⁵⁸ Similarly the Nayar Brigade and the Carnatic Brigade played a decisive role in the military exploits of the princely states. They were trained in their family gymasia⁵⁹ and excelled themselves in the arts of warfare. They were armed with bows and arrows, spears, swords and battle axes.⁶⁰ The weapons in common use included the bow and arrow, cannon, muskets, wall pieces, shields, pikes and matchlock. ⁶¹ Target, spear, dagger and sling were also familiar to them. Clay pellets, prepared by mixing the white portion of the egg with clay, served the purpose of bullets.

The number of soldiers continued to vary under different periods. The Vijayanagar rulers directed their auxiliary chieftains to maintain 320000 foot soldiers, 21600 horses and 235 elephants. ⁶²Achyutha Raya maintained six lakhs of soldiers and 24000 horses sent by his chieftains.⁶³ It is said that 18000 soldiers were sent by the poligars to defeat the chieftain of Paramakudi.⁶⁴ The Tirunelveli there were more than 30000 soldiers. Though they were known for their physical prowess and bravery they were least disciplined.⁶⁵ Like wise there were thousands of armed forces who served under each poligar. There were seventy two pollams in the Tirunelveli and Tiruchirappalli regions.

⁷⁴ Revenue Constitutions, Vol. 118, Ff.2688-90.

⁷⁵ Foreign Secret Consultations Proceedings, 17 May 1804, Ff.15085-86.

⁷⁶ Fra Bartholomeo, A Voyage to the East Indies, London, 1800, p. 173.

⁷⁷ Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 15, F. 139.

⁷⁸ Mahalingam, T.V., South Indian Polity, Madras, 1961, p. 299.

⁷⁹ Robert Sewell, The Forgotten Empire, New Delhi, 1970. p. 355.

⁸⁰ Nelson, J.H., The Madura Country a Manual, Madras, 1868, Part III, p.102.

⁸¹ Rajayyan, K., A History of Madurai, Madurai, 1974, p. 34.

In the midst of internal as well as external aggressions the Sethupathi of Ramnad evolved an administrative system mostly based on the models of the Vijayanagara and Nayak rulers. Though the Sethupathi of Ramnad trace their genesis as poligar and feudal chieftains in due course they became independent. As heads of the state they exercised unlimited executive, legislative, judicial and financial powers. The office of the principle minister of the Sethupathi of Ramnad was popularly known as *Dalavai*. He combined in himself all civil and military powers. *Pradani* became the next prominent minister under the Sethupathis of Ramnad. Usually the *Pradani* looked after the finance and the collection of revenue. They were assisted by subordinate officers called *Ambalakaran*. *Rayasam* etc. The provincial administration was carried out by the provincial governors who came under the category of local poligar chieftains. The villages were known in different names like *ur, patti, puram, kulam, kudi and mangalam*. The local poligar chieftains exercised the power to look after the law and order of their respective areas. It led to emergence of the kaval system of protection. They were popularly known as Kavalkars. They recruited the soldiers and gave the necessary training to protect and safeguard the villagers from the robbers. In such a background the Sethupathis of Ramnad began to gather momentum.