

Chapter - II

POLITICAL CONDITION

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The Sethupathi Dynasty

The sethupathis of Ramnad followed a system of succession to the throne accordingly the kings enthroned his eldest son, born through his Marava queen of sembi nadu, as his successor. If the kings did not have male heir, male children of their brothers or sisters were appointed as kings. But they should also belong to the Marava clan of Sembinadu.

Sadaika Thevar alias Udaiyan Sethupathi (1605-1621)

The most important event of Muthu Krishnappa's region was the effective organisation of the Marava Country under the Sethupathis. The Nayaks in general left the coast of the country open to foreigners. The Portuguese, taking advantage of the ancient liberal policy, established settlements along the coast without the consent of the native rulers. The entire civil and criminal jurisdiction of the fishery coast had been seized upon by the Portuguese and all dues and taxes, including the valuable revenue arising from the pearl – fishery, had been assumed by the governors appointed by the Portuguese viceroy.¹ It was probably to counteract this dangerous foreign encouragement that Muthu Krishnappa established a strong government in the Marava Country.²

From the epigraphical evidence available it is clear that SadaikaThever had been a successful ruler and did much towards peace and progress of the MaravaCountry by clearing forests and encouraging cultivation. The towns of

¹Bishop Caldwell, History of Tirunelvely, 1881, p.71

²Husini, S.A.Q., History of the Pandya Country, Madurai, 1962, p.147.

Ramnad and Pugalure were fortified with mud walls and improved. The important villages of Vadakkuvattagais, Kalayar Kovil and Pattamangalam were taken from refractory chiefs. These political and financial motives seem to have been the chief cause of the revival of the Sethupathis.³ A religious purpose was not wanting. The whole Marava Country was in a chaos of disorder and insecurity and consequently the way to Rameshwaram, to which pilgrims flocked was rendered unsafe. The date of this event is said in a Mackenzie Manuscript to be 1605. Sadaika Thevar so faithfully conducted himself to Muthukrishnappa, the Governor of Madura, and so greatly increased the latter's revenue that he had been consecrated to his Royalty by sprinkling of the water of the Ganges and made him chief of the 72 poliyagar's and gave him ensigns of dignity.⁴

Sadaika Thevar died in 1621 leaving four sons and a daughter, after ruling for seventeen years. The Sethupathi's sons were Koothan Raghunatha Sethupathi, Dalavoy Raghunatha Sethupathi, Kaliyanapuli Thevar and Bettana Nayakka Thevar and the daughter was Kathalai Nachiyar.⁵

Koothan Sethupathi (1621-1635)

Koothan Sethupathi Sadiaka's eldest son succeeded to the throne on the death of his father in 1621.⁶ This prince quietly enjoyed the fruits of his father's laborers. The country was prosperous and peaceful during the fourteen years he ruled over it. His reign seems to have been rather uneventful and barren of any political charge. He is described in an inscription in a building to be the *Talaivan* or the head man, of the Marava tribes and in another as Sethupathi. He died in 1635 childless leaving his

³Sathianatha Iyer, R., The History of the Nayakas of Madurai.", 1924, p.92.

⁴Rajaram Row, T., The Ramnad Manual, Madurai, 1891, p.216.

⁵Ramaswami, A., op.cit., p.80.

⁶Ibid., P.80.

brother Sadaika Thevar II alias Dalavoy Sethupathi to succeed him. Mr.Nelson describes Dalavoy as the son of Koothan Sethupathi; but all other authorities are against him and describe him as the brother of his predecessor.

Dalavoy Sethupathi alias Sadaika ThevarII (1635 – 1646)

Sadaika Thevar II alias Sethupathi ascended the gadi on the death of Koothan Sethupathi. According to the Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency Koothan died with out heir and Sadaika who succeeded him was the brother of Koothan.⁷ The chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis mentions the same thing.⁸ His first three years of reign passed on without any major event. Upon this Battana Nayakka alias “Thampi” an illegitimate son of the former Sethupathi first Sadaika Thevar, openly opposed the Sethupathi and made known his burning desire to oust him from the throne. Thambi Thevar was in charge of the Kalaiyarkovil territory at that time.⁹ Thambi Thevar was able to convince the authorities at Madura of the legitimacy of his claims to be the Sethupathi.¹⁰ But the Dalavoy was prepared to fight out his case and he had large measures of popular support. The Sethupathis dealing with the King of Madura became very formal. Practically he was independent. The Sethupathi had direct dealing with foreign powers on the Eastern Coast and he did not get the approval of the King of Madura for his transactions; the only obligation of the Sethupathi to the Madura king seems to have been the payment of the annual tribute.¹¹ The situation thus created necessitated a war against him since Thirumala Nayak supported his opponents’s candidature. Some chronicles state that the in subordination of the Dalavoy and his withdrawal of tribute were the causes of the war.

⁷Robert Swell, A Sketch of the Dynasties of Southern India, 1883, p.89.

⁸Seshadri, K., The Sethupathis of Ramnad, 1976, p.21.

⁹Thiruvencatachari,S., The Sethupathis of Ramnad, Karaikudi, 1959, p.21.

¹⁰Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., History of the Maravas, 1700 – 1802.

¹¹Kadhirvel,S., A History of the Maravas 1700-1802.

When the dispute assumed some proportion, Thirumala as the overlord, stepped in and decided in favour of Thambi Thevar and to stabilize his position. The Nayak's decision could be enforced only at the point of the sword. Dalavoy refused to vacate the throne and Thirumala Nayak sent a contingent of his army with the necessary supplies for seizing the throne from Dalavoy and handing it over to Thambi Thevar. Thirumala Nayak against Sethupathi gathered a large force under the generalship of Ramappaiya, Rangama Nayaka as his second in command, was assisted by the 72 Palayagars.¹² The vast army moved along the Vaigai and at the end of the day bivouacked at Chinnaravuthan Palayam. The next day it reached Vandiyur. From there, after two days march they passed through Thirupuvanam and reached "Manavira Madurai". Getting some news about movement of the vast force and furiously fought against the Madurai army.

Sadaika Thevar's spies then carried the news of the march to the Sethupathi who grew furious and immediately called all the Maravas to arms. Vannamalai Kumara Magatilan, the Kurumba Chief of Kondainkottai, the chief of the Sembianadu and Mangalanadu collected their men and joined the Sethupathi. Sadaika Thevar was ably supported by Vanniyan, Sadaika's son-in-law, the bravest fighter of the day. Two armies clashed at Ariyandapuram kottai and the Marava army emerged victorious. The Madurai camp was plundered, and 300 of their men lay dead while the Maravas lost only 60. Ramappaiya regaining his poise he renewed the attack on the place the next day. In spite of stiff resistance from the Marava army, Ramappaiya captured Ariyandapuram Kottai.¹³ He pursued the retreating Marava forces, came to Kadankudi, crossed the Vaigai and at "Avtiyutti Kottai" got up to the Marava force. In the furious

¹²Subramanian, N., History of Tamilnadu, Madurai, (A.D. 1565 – 1956), 1977, p.65.

¹³Kamalaia, C., Ramappaiyan Ammanai – A Research, Madras, 1980, p.16.

engagement that ensued in which Sadaika Thevar himself was wounded but the Madurai army gained the upperhand.

In spite of Vanniyan's bravery, Sadaika Thevar had to retreat and Avtiyuttikottai was promptly occupied by Ramappaiya. Sadaika Thevar still being pursued crossed the channel to Rameshwaram where he thought he would be safe under Lord Ramanatha's protection. At this juncture Thirumalai Nayaka had to divert his attention and resources to the northern limits of his kingdom where the Sulthan of Bijapur lay poised for an invasion. Ramappaiya and Ikkadai Venkata Krishna Ayyar jointly¹⁴ sent their forces and after trouncing the Sulthan the general returned to resume his task in the Marava country. To lay siege to Rameshwaram, Ramappaiya planned to build a bridge, thus, according to Ramappaiya Ammanai, he rebuilt the mythological Sethu. When he was discouraged by his followers, it is said that he himself carried the first stone. Soon the bridge was completed and the whole army marched into the island with the result that Sethupathi was captured and taken prisoner to Madura.¹⁵ In this war the Sethupathi was helped by the Dutch from Ceylon.

Thirumala Nayak, in his turn secured the help of the Portuguese. This fact is confirmed by the Portuguese records and Jesuit letters. The Nayak of Madura sent his ambassador, Ramappaiya to the viceroy, on the 13th August, 1639, to give an assurance on his account to the king of Portugal that in consideration of the assistance sent by him when he wished to take Marava, he undertook to give the king of Portugal a fortress in "Pampa" called Uthar, or wherever he might desire one, with a Portuguese captain, 50 Portuguese soldiers, 100 lascars and 3000 paradaos, for the maintenance of the same also to build at his own expense seven churches between "Pamban" and

¹⁴Kamalaiya, C., op.cit., p.19.

¹⁵Husaini, S.A.Q., op.cit., p.150.

“Tondi” the Nayak also gave permission¹⁶ to all those who might desire to become Christians, and promised to furnish to the king of Portugal all the assistance he might require for Ceylon, both in men and supplies.

They were most probably the later for at that time their activity on the island increased. Vanniyan, Sadaika’s able general when he learnt that the Madura forces had landed in the island offered the battle with redoubled vigour. On the third day of the battle 6,000 of the Sethupathi’s force were killed. Sadaika himself was wounded. But the Nayak’s force lost 70 leaders and 1000 soldiers. The Maravas began to refresh. But it was again Vanniyan who turned a disaster into victory. At that time Vanniyan had an attack of small-pox and the Ramappaiyan Ammanai stated that it was brought about by Ramappaiya’s magical powers. The war was resumed the next day the fortunes of war went once again against the Maravas. Hearing this Vanniyan left his sick-bed and came to the field to save the situation. In the ensuing battle the Maravas emerged victorious though they lost their hero Vanniyan.

After the death of Vanniyan Sadaika was taken prisoner, bound hand and foot and brought before the Nayak in chains by Ramappaiyan. The Nayak clapped Sadaika in jail.¹⁷ Thampi was installed as the Sethupathi. Thampi proved unpopular in the Marava Country and Raghunatha Deva and Narayan Deva, nephews of the former Sethupathi bitterly opposed him. There being nobody to befriend him among the relatives of the Sethupathi Thampi was obliged to flee to the court of the King of Madura where he did not meet with any favour this time. Once again anarchy raised its head all over the Marava Country. His inability to restore peace and order was soon demonstrated. The Bajragis, a fanatic at this time importuned Thirumala to

¹⁶Danvers, F.C., *The Portugues in India*, Vol.II, 1894, p. 268.

¹⁷Subrahmanian, N., *op.cit.*, p.65.

restore Sadaika. Thirumala released him and gave him back in his country.¹⁸ The restored Sethupathi ruled for five years and passed away in 1645. Thambi again conspired against the Sethupathi murdered him, and attempted to mount the throne about the year 1645.¹⁹ But the chronicles probably correctly say that Sadaika Thevar died a natural death.

The principal Maravas however refused to obey him and the country was once more menaced with all the horrors of civil warfare when Thirumala Nayak interfered before things had gone too far. Being the opinion that the only way of ending these troubles was by giving each of the principal claimants of the right to govern the principality a certain amount of territory and power, he resolved to divide the Ramnad kingdom into three portions and about the year 1646 the sub division containing the capital was made over to Raghunatha Thevar, whilst Sivagangai was allotted to the Thampi and Thiruvandanai to Tanakka Thevar and Naraya Thevar the two younger brothers of Raghunatha Thevar. But Raghunatha Devan taking advantage of the same annexed Thiruvadanai. He was about to collide with Thampi. But fortunately for him Thampi died. Now Raghunatha Thevar became the ruler of the whole Ramnad Country. The reference to sea fights in the Ramappaiyan Ammanai is indirectly confirmed by Portuguese records and the Jesuit Letters.

Raghunatha Thevar alias Thirumalai Sethupathi (1647-1672)

Raghunatha Sethupathi became the ruler of the shrunken kingdom of Ramnad in 1647. Thanakka Thevar, the ruler of Thiruvadanai died and thereby Raghunatha Sethupathi found no difficulty in annexing the Thiruvadanai territory.²⁰ With Thampi's compliance he annexed the towns of Mannarkoil, Pattukottai, Devakottai, Aranthangi

¹⁸Manoharan, Mee., Kilavan Sethupathi, Sivagangai, 1983, p.45.

¹⁹Nelson, J.H., The Madura Country a Manual, Madras 1868, Part III, Chapter IV p.130.

²⁰Thiruvengkatachari, S., op.cit., p.23.

and Tiruvarur from the Raja of Thanjavur. Thampi himself was getting restless at the extension of Raghunatha's territory. But he died suddenly. Thus Raghunatha found himself the ruler of a very extensive kingdom and became a veritable rival to the Madurai Nayak himself in point of territory and influence. Thirumala Nayaka supported Vijayanagara against the Muslim powers. However Emperor Sriranga III decided to occupy Madurai because of the refusal of tribute. Thirumala won the support of Golkonda and saved his kingdom. Bijapur made a settlement with Golkonda, conquered Senji, subdued Thanjavur and threatened Madurai. Confronted with this unexpected situation, Thirumala won the support of Kallar tribes and routed the invading force of Bijapur. When this difficulty was overcome, he found a hostile combination of Vijayanagara and Mysore against Madurai. There upon he won the alliance of Bijapur and forced Sriranga III to flee to Bednore in retaliation Kanthirava Narasa Rajah of Mysore, who was allied to the emperor, assembled a large army, invaded Sathyamanagalam and advanced to Madurai in 1656.²¹ The Mysore general was encouraged by the facility of his progress to march close to Madurai itself with a view to capture it. Wherever he went he is said to have executed the barbarous orders of his master by cutting the noses of all who fell into his hands, not excluding even women and children and sending them to Mysore. He sent an express order to the Sethupathis to march at once to his assistance and in order to show unmistakably the desperate plight in which he found himself to be so worded the despatch as to make it appear to be sent by queen, and not by himself. The Sethupathi gallantly obeyed the call, assembled 25,000 men without a moment of delay and suddenly camp of the enemy, and proclaimed to the king that for the present at all events he was safe. Recovering his courage Thirumala there upon collected 35,000 of the royal troops and

²¹Rajayyan,K., History of Tamilnadu, (1565-1982) Madurai, 1982, p.36.

having affected a junction with the Marava army and offered the enemy battle. But the Mysorean commander did not feel himself strong enough to risk a general engagement, and so he attempted to gain time, hoping that some expected reinforcements would make their appearance and also hoping that he might be able to seduce Thirumala's general a crafty Brahman, by the offer of a handsome bride. The latter's expectation was realized and although superior in numbers the Madurai army was for some time prevented from closing with the enemy. But Maravans were under no such control and after raising a cry of treason and thrusting the traitor in to prison, fell on the Mysorean army with great fury and after a sharp encounter put them to the rout. The Maravas pursued the fleeing Mysoreans and wreaked vengeance on them. Then the Mysore general offered an open battle. The battle was furious and each army left nearly 12,000 dead on the battle field.²² The war came to be called "The war of Noses" because of a barbarity committed by the Mysore army of cutting off the noses of its opponents. The victorious Marava army took for its motto the principle of "A nose for a nose" and it returned with the royal nose itself as part of the war booty.²³

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.²⁴ Sethupathi's exaltation was unavoidable for his fidelity which he had rendered invaluable service on more than one occasion. Once he had repelled an incursion of Mohammadans headed by Khutab Khan, in return for which he was honoured with the title of "he who propped up the

²²Fr. Bertrand, J., *la mission Du Madura*, III, 1659, p.49.

²³Subrahmanian, N., *op.cit.*, p.68.

²⁴Rajaram Rao, T., *op.cit.*, p.223.

Kingdom”, and also received permission to celebrate the “nine nights festival” (Navarathiri) in his own capital and with the same pomp and magnificence with which it was celebrated at Madurai. But a more formidable task awaited him for some still unknown reason. Poligar of Ettayapuram, one of the powerful Poligars of the day, gathered a number of contumacious poligars around him and lifted the banner revolt against the Madurai king. The task of quenching the disaffection was entrusted to Raghunatha Sethupathi. Sethupathi led a force defeated the confederation of the Poligars and put the poligar of Ettayapuram to death. He severely punished the allied poligars and tranquilised the Thirunelveli country. And for this service he was given a large slice of land in country saddled with the trifling responsibility of protecting its pearl – fishery, which yielded considerable sums of money to the royal treasury. Raghunatha Thever was therefore a most trusty vassal and well deserved the rewards and honours that were heaped upon him.²⁵ Nor did he ever give his lord occasion to repent having placed so much confidence on him. He continued for many years to reign quietly at Ramnad, abstaining from all intrigues and occupying himself with the improvement of his country. Chokkanatha Nayaka was the grandson of Thirumals Nayak who ruled over the Madurai country. The year 1662 was distinguished by a number of extra ordinary events which filled the hearts of every inhabitant with alarm. Many children were born with completed set of teeth, wolves, bears and tigers quitted the forests and roamed over the plains, and on several occasions came into the capital itself and prowled about the enclosure of the church, many persons died suddenly from no apparent causes, and swarms of insects kinds before unknown darkened the air and poisoned it with an intolerable stench, whilst their bites caused great pain. The interval of nominal peace for the country was not of long duration. About 1663 a Bijapur army under the command of Vanamian, the

²⁵Nelson, J.H., op.cit., p.138.

renowned captain of “Idal khan” came to Thiruchnoploy. Chokkanatha Nayakan called upon Raghunatha Sethupathi to help him. But the Sethupathi for the first time wavered and faulted in his loyalty to the family of the Nayak of Madura, he did not respond.²⁶ Vanamian force was completely destroying the suburbs and ruining the surrounding Chokkanatha country. The crops were destroyed villages burnt and their inhabitants were illtreated and captured to be made slaves. To avoid this dishonour, many are said to have put an end to their own lives enmasse by gathering together in a house and setting fire to it, and otherways. After pillaging the country of the Nayak of Madurai he paid him a large sum of money as a condition of his leaving the kingdom.²⁷ Chokkanatha was against the Sethupathi, who said to have refused him help when the Muhammadans invaded the kingdom.²⁸ Chokkanatha marched in to Marava country and took the forts of Thirupattur, Pudukkottai, Manamadurai, and some other places of lesser importance by penetrating into the heart of the jungle districts and obtained possession of Kalayarkovil. But his rebellious vassal regarded these losses with indifference and only retired to safe retreats whither it was impossible to follow him. And after at time Chokkanatha became weary of conducting guerrilla warfare and went to Madurai to take part of in some important religious ceremonies, leaving the command of the army in the hands of some of his officers.²⁹ In a short time the scales were turned against him. Intimate local knowledge, combined with skill in fighting in such a country as Ramnad, gave the advantages to the Maravas. Chokkanatha plunged in deep grief by the news of the shameful defeats which his captains had sustained in the Maravas country, was not receiving any visit. He had reluctantly to give up the idea of chastising his vassal and

²⁶Subrahmanian, N., op.cit., p.68.

²⁷Bertrand, J., op.cit., Part III, pp.158-159.

²⁸Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., op.cit., p.159.

²⁹Nelson, J.H., op.cit., p.188.

satisfied himself with retaining possession of some of the important forts in the Marava Country. Raghunatha Thever died in the Tamil month of Aani in 1674, leaving the throne to his nephew Rajasurya Thevar, son of Narayana Thevar.

Rajasurya Sethupathi – (1674)

Rajasurya's reign lasted only for six months and during this period he got himself involved in the intrigues of the Thanjavur Court and lost his life in the process. Alagiri, an ally of Chokkanatha Nayak of Madurai (1659 – 1682) was ruling Thanjavur. Chenga Maladas, an aspirant to the power with the support of Ekoji, a Maratha free booter, challenged the former's position. Rajasurya supported the cause of Chengamaladas against Chokkanatha.³⁰ With the details of the operations in Thanjavur, he managed to capture Rajasurya and subsequently put him to death.³¹ This Sethupathi's reign was thus brought to a close within a period of six months from Aadi to Margaly month of paridhaabi year.

Raja Suriya after his death the principal Maravans could not agree in the matter of the choice of a successor and the government was carried on temporarily by an officer who had served the late Raghunatha in not a very distinguished capacity of a betel-nut-bearer and another Maravan named Athana was chosen to preside at the celebration of the nine nights ceremony a duty of the very highest order in the estimation of the people of Ramnad. This prince is the brother of Raja Suriya and governed the country only for three months.

Raghunatha Sethupathi alias Killavan Sethupathi (1674 – 1710)

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

³⁰ Sathiyana Aiyar, R., op.cit., p.184.

³¹ Vriddhagirisan, V., The Nayaks of Tanjore, Annamalai nagar 1942. p.165.

Athana Raghunatha Sethupathi became easy. Raghunatha Thevar 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.³²

Tadiya Thevar, who staked his claim as a close relative of Thirumalai Sethupathi on his mother's side was equally ineligible. On comparative merits Raghunatha Thevar popularly known as *kilavan*, was selected by the Marava leaders as Sethupathi. Those leaders who supported Tadiya Thevar naturally were dissatisfied, and so the seed of dissension was sown. They continued to give trouble whenever possible. Kilavan Sethupathi in an attempt to normalise relationships gave one of his cousin sister's in marriage to Tadiya Thevar.³³ His reign began with his ruthless murder of two members of the Sethupathi's family who might have had any claims to the throne. Kilavan Sethupathi's first effort was to make his position secure. He exhibited unscrupulous boldness when circumstances required stern action. He executed two of his strongest supporters who wielded great influences among the Maravas on the ground that their excessive power might be used against him at any time. Kilavan Sethupathi hearing of the prowess of the Tondaimans, invited Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman and his brother Namana Tondaman to Ramnad and engaged them in military service.

³² Vamsavali (Official history of the family in palm leaves) of Ramnad Samasthanam (unpublished) and the genealogy list available at Ramnad Samasthanam. According to the tradition of the Maravas the right of succession to the throne goes to the first male child born to a wife who belonged to the kings sub-caste. There being no such issue the right goes to such female issue. In the absence of both, right of succession was to the king's brother or his near relation on the paternal side. The king could adopt somebody. If the king did not adopt and nominate anybody then the Marava leaders choose a king in accordance with the traditions. The Maravas normally considered marriage between subcastes as intercaste marriages. However the kings of Ramnad were permitted to marry from all subcaste. But the issues of these marriages though allowed the king's subcaste were not normally considered as legal heirs to the throne (Maram Padal suvadi – unpublished) Therefore, Raghunatha was not a legal heir to the throne. Sathyanatha Aiyar probably was not aware of this tradition when he called Raghunatha as the illegitimate son. He could at best be called an illegitimate claimant to the throne.

³³ Manoharan, Mee., op.cit., p .55.

They were useful in subduing a number of Thevers who were minor chieftains and had been giving the Sethupathi a good deal of trouble and thus secured the esteem of the Sethupathi. Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman signalled himself by performing two exploits he thus endeared himself to the Sethupathi. One of these was the capture of the state elephant of Tanjore, with the ruler of which state the Sethupathi was engaged in hostilities. The other was the subjugation of the *palayakar* of Ettaiyapuram.³⁴ At this time the Sethupathi fell in love with Kattali, sister of the Tondaiman, and married her. She was the second wife of Kilavan Sethupathi, who is known to have had more than forty seven wives.³⁵ This marriage strengthened the ties of friendship between the Tondaimans and the Sethupathi. In this time perceiving the attitude of his vassal, one Pallavarayan, the chief of Pudukottai, the border palayam of Ramnad, showed signs of transferring his allegiance to the king of Tanjore. Kilavan Sethupathi dismissed him. Sethupathi's second wife's brother Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman was appointed in that place. He was founder of the state of Pudukottai.

Kilavan Sethupathi created new chiefs who he thought would strengthen him and maintain the balance of power. A *palayam* called Nalukottai was created bordering the palayam of Siruvalli. The Palayagar appointed was Periya Udaya Thevar, a close relative of Kilavan Sethupathi.³⁶ The Sethupathi played a prominent and active role in foiling the attempts of one Rustom Khan to establish a Muslim dynasty in Thiruchirapalli. Rustom Khan, a favourite soldier of Chokkanatha was a cavalry officer in the Nayak force. When Chokkanatha Nayak was deposed his younger brother Muthulinga Nayak alias Muthu Alakadu became the king. Rustom

³⁴ Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., A Manual of the Pudukottai, Pudukottai State, Vol.II, Part I, 1940, p.759.

³⁵ Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., op.cit., p.760.

³⁶ Nalukottai Palayam later became Sivaganga state, Anna Samy's Pedigree on sivaganaga Zaminadary, O.S.No.4 1823 Civil Court Madura. Such Palayams were created wherever the supporters of Tadiya Thevar were power ful.

Khan was hatching a plot to usurp the throne. When Muthulinga was away from the fortress of Thiruchirapalli, he closed the gates and assumed royal authority. To win popular approval he released Chokkanatha from prison. He was able to maintain himself in power for two years, but he failed to organise a strong and efficient administration. Rustom Khan's weakness as a ruler was demonstrated by his total failure to undertake the defense effectively during the siege of Thiruchirapalli by the Mysoreans in 1680. Kilavan Sethupathi with the help of some Poligars under Chinna Katri Nayak of Kannivadi over powered Rustom Khan and murdered him. Chokkanatha and the Nayak kingdom were thus saved from the tyranny of Rushtom Khan.

The grateful Nayak bestowed the title "Para Raja Kesari"³⁷ (Lion to Foreign Kings) on the Sethupathi and transferred the services of his general Kumara Pillai to him in the year 1680. After the death of Chokkanatha Nayak in 1682, Sethupathi began to assert his independence gradually. Muthuvirappa III, the son of Chokkanatha and Mangammal succeeded his father. Venkata Krishnappa, the former Dalavoy of the Nayak soon raised the banner of revolt. Chennamaladas, the last of Thanjavur Nayaks also joined hands with them in an attack against Madurai. It was agreed that Sethupathi should cede to Thanjavur for a term of twelve years the districts lying between Pambar and Pudukottai in consideration of the military help that would be rendered by Chennamaladas. But this proposed campaign against Muthu Virappa Nayak III did not materialise, since the Dalavoy at Ramanathapuram Kumara Pillai did not approve of Sethupathi's plans. The Dalavoy made futile attempts to capture Sethupathi and Venkatakrishnappa and hand them over to the Nayak as traitors. But

³⁷Paranthamanar, A.K., Madurai Nayakkar Varalaru, Madras, 1960, P.305.

on knowing his plans Sethupathi foiled his schemes and tortured Kumara Pillai to death and killed the members of his family.³⁸

These intrigues provided MuthuVirappa Nayak III to set out on a punitive campaign against the Marava Country. Chengamaladas sent his forces to help the Sethupathi. The forces of the Nayak at the initial stages overran the whole of the Nayak, of the Marava Country. An indecisive engagement took place near Ramanathapuram. A few days later a decisive battle was fought in which the forces of Chengamaladas sent under the command of Varabogi Pandiyan, took part.³⁹ Then Sethupathi emerged victorious and the forces made Nayak had to beat a hasty retreat. This brought the war to a close soon Sethupathi found himself at war with the ruler of Thanjavur. Trouble arose over the terms and the treaty signed in 1686 between Sethupathi and the Nayak of Thanjavur. Sethupathi peremptorily undertook an invasion and succeeded in capturing the fortress of Aranthangi, Thirumayam Kottai, Piranmalai and all the territory south of Ambari River. Kilavan Sethupathi changed the capital of the Pogalur to Ramnad (Ramanatha Puram).⁴⁰ Kilavan demolished the mudwalls that surrounded Ramanathapuram and erected a stone fortress⁴¹ which consisted of a strong wall 27 feet high and 5 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

³⁸Inscription at the funeral ghat at Ramnad where Kumara Pillai was cremated. This was intended to be a warning to traitors.

³⁹Inscription at the funeral ghat at Ramnad where Kumara Pillai was cremated. This was intended to be a warning to traitors.

⁴⁰Vasanthi,C., Ramanathapuram Palace Museum Guide, Tamilnadu State Archaeology Department, 2007, p.4.

⁴¹Calcutta Review, Vol.133, p.483.

Sethupathi won the admiration of the people by his acts of benevolence and chivalry thus Kilavan became the complete master of Ramnad.

At the time of the death of Krishna Muthu Virappa Nayak, his wife Muttammal was pregnant. Hence she was restrained from committing sati. She gave birth to a son and immediately there after committed suicide in spite of the strong remonstrances of Mangammal her mother-in-law. The Prince was named Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and crowned as king. Mangammal his grand mother became regent.⁴² The regency of Mangammal is remarkable for her careful steward ship of the affairs of the kingdom. Mangammal who was the Nayak regent of the Madurai Country at this period wanted to put a check to the growing power of Sethupathi. In 1702 Dalavoy Narasappaiya securing the help of the Thanjavur forces marched against the Marava Country.

But Sethupathi was too powerful for him and the Dalavoy lost his life in the campaign. The Marava army proved superior to the war – worn Madurai forces because it was recruited almost entirely from one stock of people. The military administration was so well carried on that Sethupathi could collect even 30,000 or 40,000 men in a week. Kilavan Sethupathi defeated the combined army in a battle in which Narasappaiya lost his life. The Thanjavur army with drew and the Rani of Madurai had to suffer great humiliation. The Rani was certainly ill-advised in her scheme to humble Sethupathi's pride with the alliance of Thanjavur. Kilavan was so much puffed up with his success in the war that he declared his independence Ramnad which had been subordinated to Madurai, Possibly for many centuries, became an independent kingdom. This was no small blow on the prestige and power of the great

⁴²Husaini, S.A.Q., op.cit., p.161. Sathyanatha Aiyar, R. op.cit., p .204.

Nayaks of Madurai.⁴³ A total drought and a severe famine affected the Ramnad country in 1709 and people succumbed to it in large numbers. There was discontent and confusion every where and the people were dying of thirst and hunger. More turbulent people resorted to murders.

Even at normal times the Ramnad country was not self sufficient in the food front. The miseries of famine further aggravated the situation. The state of affairs weakened Sethupathi to a considerable extent. Taking advantage of these conditions the king of Thanjavur invaded the Marava Country in the Arantangi region⁴⁴ in order to get back the territories lost to the Sethupathi's army. Even though they were weak because of natural calamities, their physical strength did not fail them and they beat back the invaders and defended Arantangi fort. During this war Madurai was just an observer. Rani Mangammal failed to subdue her turbulent vassal and before her death (1709) Ramnad became a separate independent kingdom.⁴⁵ Kilavan Sethupathi who achieved freedom for Ramnad, did not live long to consolidate his gains. The prince of Marava died in 1710 aged more than eighty. During the thirty six years of his reign he did yeoman service for his country. He had to encounter oppositions from many quarters. But he got over them all and successfully achieved independence to his country. Above all he never failed to attend to the needs of his people in adversity too.

Thiru Udaya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1710 – 1725)

Kilavan Sethupathi died without an heir. His death was followed by succession dispute which threatened the solidarity and independence of the Marava Country by inviting the Maravas to interfere in their affairs.

⁴³Thiruvengkatachari, S., op.cit., p.33.

⁴⁴Bertrand, J., op.cit., IV, pp.200-201.

⁴⁵Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., op.cit., p.213.

Kilavan Sethupathi not blessed with a legitimate son, nominated his illegitimate son Bhavani Sankara Thevar⁴⁶ born to a concubine living in the palace as his successor. The nomination was not in line with the Marava tradition.

Therefore, the nomination was not acceptable to the Maravas and after the death of Kilavan Sethupathi, Thiru Udaya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi succeeded to the throne. Amidst ceremonial pomp he was crowned on a Vijayadashmi day and this accounts for the prefix “Vijaya” in his second name⁴⁷ He was constantly troubled by this rival Bhavani Sankaran. He had to keep his forces in constant readiness for any military undertaking though this challenge to his position considerably retarded the growth of administrative institutions, Sethupathi was able to introduce some reforms. He had first to turn his attention to the welfare of his country, which was greatly endangered by the late heavy rains and tempest. He repaired and improved the irrigation works and brought the revenue system of the country into proper order. Able accountants of the Vellala caste were fetched from Madurai and accurate accounts of the villages began to be prepared while the whole kingdom for easier administration was first divided into eight Revenue Districts. For purposes of external war he had divided the country into seventy – two military

⁴⁶The Sethupathis of Ramnad used to have a large harem. There were wives of the Sethupathis from his own sub-caste, wives from other sub-caste of the Maravas and concubines (of other castes) who lived in the palace and outside the palace. (Diary of Baskara Sethupathi). There were even political marriages. The Sethupathis married from the families of powerful Marava chiefs who did not belong to the Sethupathi's sub-caste. According to Hindu tradition the child inherited the father's caste all the Maravas used the surname Thevar and Bhavani Sankaran also used that surname. There is reason to believe that Bhavani Sankara's mother was not properly married though lived in the palace. For the Vamsavali of the Ramnad Samasthanam does not mention about her while speaking about the wives of Kilavan. This document cannot be dismissed as hostile to Bhavani Sankara For it makes specific references to his nomination to the throne, and administration he was born to Kilavan, therefore it may be inferred that he might have been the son of a concubine who lived in the palace. Such people did not command the same respect as the other members of the royal family. All the accounts uniformly agree that Bhavani Sankara was the illegitimate son of Kilavan.

⁴⁷Rameswami, A., op.cit., p.90.

divisions appointing feudal chieftains as heads of each division, which was granted to them free of any tribute so long as the service was up held.

He constructed strong forts in Rajasingamangalam, Oriyur, Arantangi, Thirupattur, Pamban and Kamuthi.⁴⁸ He had a number of forts built, including one at Kamuthi which the French helped him to build; he added an artillery division to his army with Dutch assistance. He ruled a vast territory between Thiruvavur in the North and Thirunelveli in the South.⁴⁹ Thiru Udaya Thever's reign marked the beginning of the Sivagangai Zamindari. Nallukottai Udaya Thever won the favour of the Sethupathi and got the illegitimate daughter (Agilandeswary Natchiyar) of Sethupathi. Agilandeswary Natchiyar married to his son Sasivarna Thever with the dowry in the form of lands enough to maintain 1000 men. Bhavani Sankara was making all efforts to get the Ramnad throne. Even after knowing well that most of the powerful leaders were backing Vijaya Raghunatha, Bhavani Sankara tried to win over the Christians by pointing out the unsympathetic attitude of the Sethupathi towards the Christians.⁵⁰

However he could not succeed in bringing out a civil war Bhavani Sankara appealed to the Tondaiman of Pudukkottai, a like minded man and a relative of one of Kilavan Sethupathi concubines.⁵¹ Though Kilavan Sethupathi nominated him as a vassal to Ramnad it seems probable because of the affection he had for the Tondaiman's sister, he allowed the latter a free hand. After the death of Kilavan Sethupathi, the Raja of Pudukkottai was in no mood to be a vassal of Ramnad. Therefore he readily assured Bhavani would recognise his independence. But nothing substantial happened. Thiru Udaya in the last years of his reign had to meet the

⁴⁸Thiruvengkatachari,S., op.cit., p.46.

⁴⁹Subrahmanian, N., op.cit., p.75.

⁵⁰The Sethupathi Confiscated lands belonging to the catholic churches in oriyur, Thiruvadana and puliyal in the year 1721 and denoted them to the brahmans (list of copper plate grants of Ramnad Samasthanam, Ramnad and Settlement Register, Ramnad, 1861).

⁵¹Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., op.cit., p.227

challenges of the combined armies of three powers. Bhavani Sankara, the imposter secured the helps of the ruler of Thanjavur in his designs against the Marava Country. Pudukottai chieftain, a brother-in-law of Kilavan Sethupathi also encouraged Bhavani Sankara and the three forces combined to attack the Marava Country. Sethupathi was compelled to march out to Arantangi to fight against the enemies.⁵² Some indecisive actions took place. An epidemic broke out in the camp of Sethupathi which carried off many of his sons and wives. Not long after this bereavement the Sethupathi himself fell a victim to the epidemic and it proved fatal after he was removed to Ramanathapuram in 1720. 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. All his legitimate children seem to have carried away by the disease. Consequently he was succeeded by his son-in-law Sundrasewara Raghunatha Sethupathi or Thanda Thevar as he is called by some.

Sundareswara Raghunatha Sethupathi alias Thanda Thevar (1726)

Before the death of Thiru Udaya Thevar he had nominated one Thanda Thevar, a great grandson of the Kilavan's father as his successor. But Bhavani Sankara, basing his claims to the throne on his nomination by the Kilavan, tried diplomacy to defeat his rival. Through the support of his mother-in-law the late Sethupathi's principal concubine he had married her niece; he secured popular support and became Sethupathi. But Thanda Thevar was not prepared to surrender his right without a struggle. He succeeded in getting help of the King of Madura and the Raja of Pudukottai to enforce his claims by the promise of territorial cession to the latter. In a short time, he laid siege to Arantangi, and Bhavani Sankara, dismayed at

⁵²Nelson, J. H., part III, op.cit., p.248.

the sight of the large army he had to give up battle and hurriedly escaped to Thanjavur.⁵³ Thanda Thevar returned to his capital. Bhavani Sankara made some specific promises to cede the territories north of Pambar in return for military assistance. The Maratha King who was over eager to get back these territories accepted the terms and a treaty were concluded.⁵⁴ Three months after the treaty was concluded between Bhavani Sankara Thevar and King of Thanjavur a strong army under Bhavani Sankara and Ananda Rao Peshwa the Thanjavur General invaded Ramnad.⁵⁵ Thanda Thevar called upon his allies for support, and the allied army came to the rescue of Thanda Thevar. In the battle that followed the conduct and valour coupled with the strategy of the Thanjavur general Ananda Rao Peshwa secured him two signal victories. In the confederates from combining themselves in a second he defeated the forces of the Tondaiman and captured two of his sons. The Tondaiman sued for peace and obtained it. The victorious general then laid siege to Ramnad and after encountering resistance entered it.⁵⁶ Bhavani Sankara Thevar became Sethupathi and Thanda Thevar was put to death later on.

Bhavani Sankara Sethupathi (1726 – 1729)

Bhavani Sakara thus became Sethupathi a second time and reigned till about the year 1729, when he was in his turn deposed under the following circumstances. He treated the poligars under him injudiciously. Sasivarna Periya Udaya Thevar was deprived of his *palayam* of Vallikottai, one of the eight revenue districts of the Marava Country. Sasivarna was driven out of his *palayam* and fled to Thanjavur when he ingratiated himself with the king by slaying single – handed a very large and

⁵³Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., op.cit., p.228.

⁵⁴O.S.No.40f 1823. Civil proceedings papers and exhibition sivaganga suit. Corroborative evidence are found in the Saromahal library (Political Papers Kandasami Pillai, Madi Records.

⁵⁵“Ramnad Charithiram” Mackenzie Manuscripts unpublished. Oriental Manuscripts Library Madras.

⁵⁶J.A., Vol.46.1917 pp.221-222.

ferocious tiger. Kattaya Thevar, brother of the late Sethupathi (Thanda Thevar) who had escaped from Ramnad at the time of its capture by Bhavani Sankara Thevar, was also at this time at Thanjavur. The two companions in misfortune soon became friends and resolved to join in an attempt to overthrow the usurper of the Ramnad crown. Thanjavur King was already angry with Bhavani Sankara for his repudiation of his treaty obligations. Kattaya Thevar and Sasivarna Thevar became good allies. They jointly induced the king of Thanjavur to provide them with a force to invade the Marava Country on condition of ceding him the territories north of Pambar. The Thanjavur king agreed to this the Marava Country was invaded. The Dalavoy of Thanjavur was accordingly despatched with an army to depose the Sethupathi and reinstate the exiles and a battle was fought at Oriyur in which the Sethupathi was defeated and made prisoner.⁵⁷ He was then carried off to Thanjavur and after being vehemently reproached for his breach of faith thrown into prison.⁵⁸ The successful campaign of Thanjavur against Bhavani Sankara led to the partition of the Marava Country. All the territories north of the Pambar were taken by Thanjavur in accordance with the term of the understanding which preceded her recent Ramnad campaign.

Kattaya Thevar alias Kumara Muthu Vijaya

Raghunatha Sethupathi (1729 – 1735)

After this success Kattaya Thevar was proclaimed Sethupathi. But Marava Country was parcelled out into five portions in 1733.⁵⁹ Three of the five were ceded to Kattaya Thevar who occupied the throne with the title Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, and two parts were made over to Sasivarna Thevar, who

⁵⁷Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Varalaru, Ramanathapuram, 2003, P.55.

⁵⁸Nelson, J.H., op.cit., p.249.

⁵⁹Kamal, S.M., Vidudhalai Poril Sethupathi Mannar, Ramanathapuram, Nov. 1997, p.51.

assumed the title of Raja Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Periya Udaiya Thevar, though he was more commonly known as the Nalu Kottai – Udaiya Devan from being the possessor of four fortresses. He was subsequently styled as the Raja of Sivagangai. Sivagangai territory was also called “Chinna Vadagai” denoting smaller country. Kattaya Thevar started his reign which was called “Periyavadagai” denoting larger country. The Raja of Ramnad is described as “Greater Maravar” and the Rajah of Sivagangai as “lesser Maravar”. Kattaya Thever was also called Periya Maravan. In these days there were two invasions of the Marava Country by the forces of Thanjavur under Tukkoji, the successor of Serfoji I. In the first attempt the Thanjavur armies narrowly escaped destruction in the second attempt made by Thanjavur under the generalship of the famous Ananda Rao the invading armies had to withdraw in the middle of the protracted siege of Thirumayam.⁶⁰ In the history of the United Marava Kingdom, in the days of the Kilavan Sethupathi it had covered an extent of five thousand square miles which was reduced to a small principality in the days of Kattaya Thevar. During his reign two of his leading civil servants, were called *pradanis*. They were Ramalingam Pillai and Vairavan Servai.⁶¹ Kattaya Thevar was succeeded by his son Siva Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Thevar in 1735.

Siva Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1735 – 1748)

This Prince was called by the name of “Saiva Durai” because he abstained from eating animal food,⁶² as he was a vegetarian. This Sethupathi was ably assisted by a competent minister called Vellaiyan Servaikaran. He seems to have been a man of great energy and ability and to have succeeded in getting all the power of the Ramnad Government in to his own hands. This Sethupathi’s rule was uneventful and

⁶⁰Subrahmanian, N., op.cit., p.78.

⁶¹Manoharan, Mee., op.cit., p.135.

⁶²Thiruvengkatachari, S., op.cit., p.50.

undisturbed by any wars. Sivakumara Muthuvijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi died childless in 1748. Minister and Dalavoy Vellayan Servaigar nominated Racka Thevar, a cousin of the late Kattaya Thevar as the successor.

Sethupathi Racka Thevar (1748 – 1749)

After the death of Saiva Durai, his minister Vellayan Servaigar nominated Racka Thevar a cousin of Kattaya Thevar as his successor. Soon after the accession of this Sethupathi, the Raja of Thanjavur invaded the Ramnad country but the Dalavoy Vellayan Servaigar had succeeded in defeating the invader. The Dalavoy then made an expedition to the south with a view to reducing the poligars of Madurai Kingdom. It is said that he subdued all the poligars except the poligar of Ettaiyapuram, who was spared probably because Sethupathi venerated him as Guru.⁶³ This success greatly enhanced his power and prestige and turned his head. The Sethupathi became a tool in his hands. The Dalavoy became a virtual dictator. The cruel acts of the Dalavoy made him unpopular and an intrigue resulted in an attempt to ruin the successful Dalavoy. The intriguers induced Sethupathi to recall the Dalavoy from Tirunelveli. But he turned the tables on his adversaries and rebelled against the Sethupathi who had to flee for safety to the fort of Pamban. The Dalavoy however, pursued and imprisoned him.⁶⁴ Vellayan Servaigar, the king maker, then deposed Racka Thevar and placed on the throne Sella Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1749.

Sella Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1749-1763)

Sella Thevar was aunt's grandson to Sivakumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi. He became the Sethupathi in 1749 and he ruled for thirteen years. The first major event of his period was an invasion of the Ramnad Kingdom by the

⁶³Nelson, J.H., op.cit., p.293.

⁶⁴Rajaram Rao, T., op.cit., p.241.

Thanjavur ruler which was repulsed by the powerful Dalavoy Vellayan Servaikar.⁶⁵ In the year 1752 Vellayan Servaikar, the Dalavoy of the Sethupathi and Thandavaraya Pillai the Minister of Sivagangai besieged Captain Cope who had taken possession of Madurai Country on behalf of the Rajah of Mysore. They succeeded in forcing him to capitulate and crowned the adopted son of Meenakshi and established him in Madurai. But he was however deposed by the agents of Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot. The Dalavoy of Ramanthapuram again attacked Madurai and defeated the Mohammedan forces. They were however allowed to hold Madurai in a tributary capacity and as a vassal of Ramanathapuram on the condition that they disavowed the Nawab's authority.

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.⁶⁶ 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 with out 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 seaports to the English as the price of the acceptance of their offer of alliance.⁶⁷ The Sethupathi's ideas were to subdue the trouble some *palayakkars* of Thirunelveli with English help. But when

⁶⁵Thiruvenkatachari, S., op.cit., p.51.

⁶⁶Kamal, S.M., op.cit., p.59.

⁶⁷Rajayyan, K., op.cit., p.151.

Thanjavur and Pudukottai had done with the Sethupathi the Thirunelveli campaign had an abrupt end.

The Dutch were trying hectically at this period to secure a foot hold in the country. They managed to win the friendship of Sella Thever and presented to him articles of great value. They sought his permission to establish trading settlements 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 factories 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 appears 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.

Muthuramalinga Sethupathi (1763 – 1772 and 1782 – 1795)

Sella Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi died leaving behind no sons and so his sister's son Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi barely two months old was proclaimed the Sethupathi. He ascended the throne and Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha, the uncle of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi assumed the office of Regent.⁶⁸ The young Raja was under the guardianship of Muthu Thiruvayee, his mother who acted as the regent during this Dalvay Dhamodaram Pillai minority. Dhamodaram Pillai was a very able general and minister. The people did not approve of the regency of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha as his rule was very oppressive. Dhamodaram Pillai added to the

⁶⁸Ramnad Samasthanam Genealogy list.

defence of Ramnad fort and erected a fort at Thirupullani,⁶⁹ was not cared for by the de facto ruler, who was trying to become the de jure ruler.⁷⁰

Dhamodaram Pillai understood the designs of the Regent and was hatching counter plans to thwart them. He tried to turn the people against the regent by taking advantage of the discontent of the people with the Regent's irksome taxes. The regent was bent upon getting of Dhamodharam Pillai. But he was afraid of his popularity. So he waited for a suitable opportunity. That opportunity presented itself when the Nawab requested him for assistance against Yusuf Khan. The Regent immediately sent Dhamodharam Pillai to the troops to assist the Nawab against Yusuf Khan so that he might be away from Ramnad.⁷¹ Dhamodharam Pillai was quick to realise the evil designs of the Regent. To counteract then he entered into a secret agreement with Thandavaraya Pillai of Sivaganga who was on a similar mission. This agreement was approved by Muthu Vaduganatha Periya Udaya Thevar, the King of Sivaganga who was a close relative of the Ramnad King.⁷²

The Dalavoy knew that it was but the beginning of the troubles that were in store for him and to meet the situation he entered into an alliance with the Dutch East India Company, the bitter rivals of the English East India Company who being the Nawab's chief creditor, actively supported his military undertakings. The treaty was signed on the 24th June 1767, granting share of the fishery from the Madurai Coast. The Dalavoy 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

⁶⁹This fort can be still seen in a dilapidated condition.

⁷⁰Sayalgudi Zamin Records, Correspondence with Dhamodaram Pillai, Unpublished olai.

⁷¹M.C. 12th December, 1763, Vol.19, p.708.

⁷²Sivaganga Blue Books, p.293. Blue Books private collections of the historical records of the Sivaganga Zamindars. All the papers relating to litigations are appended.

concessions.⁷³ The possession of Arantangi area was a bone of contention from the days of Kilavan Sethupathi between the Maravas and the Thanjavur king. Originally a Marava territory, it changed hands between the Maravas and the Thanjavur king several times. During the civil disturbances in Ramnad in 1763, Thanjavur annexed the Arantangi territory,⁷⁴ to their own, and Ramnad could not defend it because of the developments at home. The first Anglo-Mysore War (1767-1769) provided the opportunity. Haider Ali invaded Thanjavur in 1769. Dhamodaram Pillai and Thandavaraya Pillai, respectively Pradhanies of Ramnad and Sivagangai lost no time in attacking the Thanjavur forces in the occupied territory. The Hanumanthagudi fort was taken by the Maravas and the entire Arantangi area was reconquered and annexed to Ramnad.⁷⁵ Thuljaji referred the issue to the Madras Council and the Council gave him a blank cheque to clear the territory of its invaders.⁷⁶ Meanwhile the Raja's relation with Pudukkottai and Sivaganga too became hostile. The Kallans of Pudukkottai intruded into Thanjavur every now and then and the Raja of Sivaganga captured a few elephants belonging to Thuljaji. These minor incidents made Thuljaji enthrone at Ramnad his candidate Mappilla Thevar, a rival to the boy-king so that he could establish his way over the Maravas and Pudukkottai.⁷⁷ Dhamodharan Pillai himself led the Marava forces and ousted the Raja of Thanjavur. The Maravas lost a valuable general and administrator, when Dhamodharam Pillai met with his death in the hands of a private enemy. He was succeeded by Pitchai Pillai.

⁷³Ramaswami, A., op.cit., p.95.

⁷⁴Karnatic Papers (Marathi in modi script) Saraswathi mahal Library Thanjavore B.No. 197 C internal no. 42, Item 9.

⁷⁵Translation of a Persian letter from the Raja of Pudukkottai to Col.woodhyre 1183, Pudukkottai Samasthanam Records (A.D.1770) Thuljaji, 15th July 1771, letter to Madras council, M.C.Vol.19, pp.187-190.

⁷⁶Mohamed Ali, 8th March, 1771, letter to Madras Council – M.C.Vol. 19, pp.83-85.

⁷⁷Moahmed Itabarkhan, 17th March, 1771, letter to Madras Council. M.C.Vol. 19, p.118.

Therefore in February 1771 Thuljaji marched to Ramnad at the command of a large detachment, whose strength was given as 4,000 horses and 50,000 sepoys.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ But Thuljaji without paying any heed to this he went ahead with his hostile preparations by coding Thirupathur and the services of a body of the Nawab's troops by granting Pallikonda.⁸¹

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,⁸² but did nothing perhaps because by mutual rivalry for his taking advantage of the situation.⁸³ 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. After a clash in which each side lost about ninety men, the Ramnad troops withdrew to Armogam.⁸⁴ Manoji, the general of Thanjavur himself decided to put a stop to his aggressive activities because of the possibility of wider estrangement by the young Raja over ruling him. The invaders swept the posts of Sundarapandiyapuram, Variur, Mangalagudi, Kannangudi,

⁷⁸Dalavoy of Ramnad, Undated letter to Makhdoom Ali Khan – Copy Military country correspondence, vol. 19, p.65.

⁷⁹Dalavoy of Ramnad, 26th Jan.

⁸⁰M.C.1771/vol.19, p.32.

⁸¹M.C.1771/vol.19, pp.86-87.

⁸²M.C.1771, vol.19, pp.35-38.

⁸³Rajayyan, K., British Diplomacy in Thanjavore, p.56.

⁸⁴M.C.1771, vol. 19, pp.36-38.

Kondavalanthan and Hanumanthakudi in succession,⁸⁵ and infested the strong post of Armogam, key to Ramnad. Armogam fell on the 19th February.⁸⁶ The next day Pradani Pichai Pillai being undaunted by the advance of the Thanjavur forces and mobilized all forces and prepared for the defence of the capital.⁸⁷

Despite the fact that Thulaji was in an advantageous position, he suggested terms for settlement. He asked the Rani to pay a visit to him with her son Sethupathi to apologise the marriage to the son of Mappilla Thevar, to agree to the marriage with the sister of Mappilla Thevar, to cede the district of Armogam to his rival to the throne and to surrender half of her treasures together with two heavy guns and two large elephants to Thanjavur. Though the terms of the treaty were humiliating, yet the queen consented to matrimonial alliances and even to the territorial clause and offered to part with two lakhs of rupees, one heavy gun and, one large elephant. But she firmly refused to pay a visit to the Raja as it was amounted to an insult to her honour. But Thulaji puffed up with pride refused to come to terms with her.⁸⁸ The forces of Thanjavur attacked the fort of Ramnad and struck down a part of the wall to the extent of forty feet. The Maravas, 9000 strong on the otherhand repaired the breaches in the night and made repeated attacks. They also broke open the big tank of Ramnad and flooded the camp of Thanjavur.⁸⁹ As both sides were exhausted,⁹⁰ they renewed negotiations. On the 9th March, they arrived at a settlement by which the queen ceded most of the occupied territories, Hanumanthagudi to Thanjavur and Armogam to Mappilla Thevar.

⁸⁵M.C.1771, vol. 19, p.76.

⁸⁶M.C.1771, vol.19, pp.80-81.

⁸⁷M.C.1771, vol.19, p.82.

⁸⁸M.C.1771, vol. 19, pp.83-85.

⁸⁹M.C.1771, vol. 19, p.106.

⁹⁰Kamal, S. M., op.cit., p.13.

She also paid 1, 30,000 rupees to the Raja and parted with two pieces of cannon and two elephants. The weakened Ramnad was left in possession of only its southern district. On the otherhand, Thanjavur acquired territories yielding annual revenue of three lakhs of Madura chakrams or rupees.⁹¹ This was indeed a humiliating treaty and Ramnad had to accept the defeat, though it managed to be independent by not accepting the levy of annual tribute.⁹² But in November 1771 Thuljaj had to return the lands and money taken from the queen on the orders of the Nawab.⁹³ The Nawab of Arcot 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.⁹⁴ He further added that Sethupathi did not pay any tribute and ascended the throne without his consent.⁹⁵ Without examining the merits of the case the Madras Government actively supported the Nawab's policy and sent a force under Col. Jeseoph 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.

⁹¹The Ramnad Samasthanam Records how ever do not mention about the parting of the two cannons and elephants. And the amount paid by the Rani is mentioned as Rs.30,000 only. (Accounts book for the year 1771 Ramnad Samasthanam).

⁹²Collection of Treaties of Raja of Ramnad. Now in possession of Kasinatha Durai, Ramnad.

⁹³Natarajan,S., Sethupathis of Ramnad Unpublished thesis. p.120.

⁹⁴M.C.C. Vol.19, p.247 and Vol.21,pp.101-102.

⁹⁵M.C., 1771, Vol.19, p.2447 and M.C., 1772, Vol.21, pp.101-102.

The fort was equipped with heavy cannon and fifty – eight guns and surrounded by open space and forty – four bastions and a ditch.⁹⁶

On the 28th the army took the queen by surprise and completely surrounded Ramnad. The allies attack on Ramnad took place even before the queen knew that there was complaint against her. Another army led by Abraham Bounjour from Madura advanced to the eastern borders of Sivaganga and captured Thiruppuvanam⁹⁷ there by preventing the troops of Sivaganga from marching to the aid of the Sethupathi. The military operations were thus effectively co-ordinated. Umdat-Ul-umara who exercised general control of the operations opened negotiations with the Queen Regent for giving a peaceful occupation of Ramnad. But that proved futile. On the 1st June Smith ordered a general siege and the next day, made a breach on the walls. At 5.00 p.m on 2nd June a cross of grenadiers led by Major John Braithwaite attacked the 3,000 strong Marava garrison, many died fighting, while the rest fled.⁹⁸The combined forces of the British and the Nawab killed Vaduganatha Thevar 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.⁹⁹

Smith admitted that since the fort was attacked suddenly these 3,000 men inside the fort did not know what to do, Ramnad fell¹⁰⁰ the invaders plundered towns and imprisoned the royal family including Velu Natchiar popularly known as Vellachi, the daughter of Vaduganatha Thever, the Queen Regent, her son the twelve

⁹⁶M.C., 1772, Vol.21,p.159.

⁹⁷Josias Du Pre in Council 1st June, 1772, M.C., Vol.42, p.442.

⁹⁸M.C., 1772, Vol.42.p.479.

⁹⁹ Jeevabharati, K., Velu Natchiar, Kumaran Publishers, Chennai, 2007, p.148.

¹⁰⁰Joseph Smith, 8th June 1772. Letter to Madras Council, in M.C., Vol.42, p.488.

years old Sethupathi and her two daughters. The royal prisoners were taken to Thiruchirapalli.¹⁰¹ The Ramnad Country then came under the direct management of the Nawab who leased it to a renter and it remained in the hands of the Nawab for about eight years till A.D., 1780. The Nawab renamed Ramnad as Alinagar.¹⁰² The Nawab confiscated the lands of the peasants and handed them over to his favourites.¹⁰³ Ever since the annexation of Ramnad it experienced nothing but exaction.¹⁰⁴ The Nawab's administrative measures of commission and omission such as dropping out of popular names confiscation of the lands of the peasants and handing them over to his favourites earned the general animosity of the people. Further the loyal adherents of the Sethupathi could not forget the arrest of their king and so they demanded the restoration of their chief. They threatened to capture Ramnad and drive away the Nawab's camp and company's troops and threw rockets in to the forts held by the Nawab's forces as a result of which the Nawab's men took asylum in fortified places.¹⁰⁵ Mappilla Thevar, the uncle of the Sethupathi and a former claimant to the throne of Ramnad wanted to avail himself of the opportunity. He had the backing of the people as they preferred any Marava ruler to that of a Muslim ruler. The rebels united under the leadership of Mappilla Thevar captured a considerable part of the country.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile in Sivaganga Thandavaraya Pillai, the former Diwan sought the aid of Haider Ali for the restoration of the state to the house of the former ruler.

¹⁰¹Josias Du Pre and Council, 20th June 1772. Letter to Court of Directors Military Despatches to England. Vol.7-9. pp.80-81.

¹⁰²Ramnad Book for 1782, No.203.

¹⁰³Tirunelveli Book for 1782, No.5.

¹⁰⁴M.C., 1772, Vol.43, p.1038.

¹⁰⁵Correspondence on the Permanent settlement of the southern pollams and Ramnad and sivaganga Zamindari A.D., 1799 – 1808, p.28.

¹⁰⁶M.C., 1772, Vol.21., pp.282-283.

Haider Ali promised help for the liberation of the Marava States.¹⁰⁷ But as Thandavaraya Pillai died suddenly this could not materialise after the death of the Pradani the Maruthu brothers who were with the queen became prominent. They took a lead in the affairs of the occupied territory. They had been waiting for the earliest opportunity to usurp power. That opportunity presented itself when the Second Mysore War broke out in A.D., 1780 when Haider Ali fell upon Arcot in A.D., 1780; the Marathas with the help of a small force obtained from Syed Sahib, the general at Dindigal desolated the Nawab's territories upto Madurai. Upon the advance of the Marathas to Sivaganga the ill disciplined forces of the Nawab stationed in the walled towns offered no resistance. Velu Natchiar accompanied by three thousand horses and ten thousand sepoy given by Haider Ali entered Sivaganga. She further recruited and trained her own people. She appealed them to take the training in warfare seriously to recover Sivagangai from the Nawab. She divided the soldiers into three groups, of which of one group was exclusively for women and named as "Udayal Women Force" and trained by herself. Each of the remaining two groups was trained Chinna Maruthu and Periya Maruthu.

Vellachi, the daughter of Vaduganatha Thevar was proclaimed queen of Sivaganga and the Marathas became her ministers. The invasion of Haider Ali prevented the Nawab from receiving additional troops to Sivaganga and it led to the success of the rebellion in Ramnad. Mappilla Thevar with the assistance of Haider Ali expelled the Nawab's troops from Ramnad.¹⁰⁸ The people of Ramnad preferred Mappilla Thevar to the Nawab. The Nawab having lost control over both Ramnad and Sivagangai became panicky about the turn of events. Haider Ali was growing in

¹⁰⁷Correspondence on the permanent settlement of the southern pollams and Ramnad and Sivaganga Zamindaries. 1799 – 1808, p.28.

¹⁰⁸ Tinnevely book, January, 1782, no.5.

strength in the Carnatic and everything looked dismal for the English. Further, small chiefs of South India were induced to create disturbances against the Nawab. Thus he had no alternative but to release Sethupathi and rein him. The Nawab released Sethupathi on 9th April, 1781.¹⁰⁹ It had the desired effect and the chiefs were pacified. Mappilla Thevar there upon joined Haider Ali.¹¹⁰ Sethupathi was asked to pay tribute of Rs. 1, 75,000 to the Nawab on the basis of his annual revenues being five lakhs of rupees. In the beginning Sethupathi showed a disposition to be faithful to the Nawab. But once he got control over his territory, he began to show his rebellious tendency.

While this tendency was growing, he interfered in the affairs of Sivaganga country, for getting that it was also another Marava state. He sought to fight 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. But he had to give up his attempt when in A.D., 1784 the company which administered in the Nawab's territories under the assignment recognised both Ramnad and Sivaganga. When Haider Ali ransacked the southern territories he had made one Kattu Raja, a Nayak prince as the ruler of Madurai.¹¹¹ 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 2nd September, 1783.¹¹² So he had to seek the help of the French. On the 10th May 1787 Sethupathi's Diwan Sankara Narayana Pillai wrote to the Governor

¹⁰⁹ M.C. 1781, vol.74, p. 1076.

¹¹⁰ M.C. 1781, vol. 575, p. 2129.

¹¹¹ M.C., 1781 Vol. 73, p.273.

¹¹² Bishop Galdwell, op.cit., p.83.

General of the French in India asking for help for the independence of the States of Madura and Ramnad.¹¹³

The letter also stated that the faithful Diwan left no stone unturned to free the country even when the king was a prisoner at Thiruchirappalli. Both Ramnad and Madura promised to give ports and lands and also to meet the expenses of the war in five years time in case the French had helped them to be free from the Nawab. The French were also interested in such an alliance. But the outbreak of the Third Mysore War made this alliance impossible. Disappointed in the direction, Sethupathi had to pretend to be in friendship with the Nawab and the English. The refusal of Vellachi, the princess of Sivaganga to marry the Sethupathi made the latter to sever his connections with Sivaganga and the Marudhus. He closed the road leading from Tinnevely to Thondi as a result of which Sivaganga lost of custom duty collected at Parthibanur. In retaliation Chinnamarudhu delivered a steam flowing from his territory into Ramnad. Now both the states were at logger heads with each other.¹¹⁴ The conflict spread like wild fire when several poligars openly or clandestinely aided the one or the other. The council restricted by the Nawab's sovereignty over the Maravas could not take any action to nip the trouble in its bud.¹¹⁵ In consequence the war continued culminating in battles at Anandoor, Vasianoor and Paramakudi.¹¹⁶

But neither side won any decisive victory. The forces of Ramnad were sent to 150 villages in Sivaganga while the Maradhus carried off the inhabitants of Paramakudi. At last the Nawab and the Company intervened. Landon, the Company's collector of poligar *peshkush* directed both to stop the war. But Sethupathi who

¹¹³French Translation of a Tamil letter written by S.N.Pandia Pillai, Diwan of Ramnad to G.G. of French India, 9th May 1787.

¹¹⁴P.D., to England, 1794, Vol.3., pp.332-333.

¹¹⁵P.D., to England, 1794, Vol.3, pp.316-318.

¹¹⁶M.C., 1794, Vol, 186, p.263.

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.¹¹⁷ So Sethupathi had to withdraw from further participation in war. George Powney, the successor of Landon directed the Sethupathi to meet him in person and explain his conduct. But the latter refused.¹¹⁸ This enraged the Company. Further when a famine visited the southern provinces, the Madras Council directed Sethupathi to permit the free import of grains to his territory, but he continued the collection of duties.¹¹⁹ But this also fell on deaf ears as Sethupathi was tending to assume an independent status.¹²⁰ At the commencement of the Sethupathi's reign, the Government was in the hands of Muthu Pillai, Velu Pillai and Sankara Pillai who were his *pradhani's* or civil servants. These were succeeded by the famous revenue reformer Muthulrappa Pillai. Unlike his predecessors he firmly believed that the best way of improving the country was by internal reforms and by hearty co-operation with the English who were becoming the virtual masters of the Carnatic.

In A.D. 1790, the Madras government finding it difficult to induce the Nawab to pay his share of the Company's expenses which the latter incurred with regard to the administration of military operations in the so called Nawab's territory, assumed by proclamation the management of the Nawab's territory and established the Board of Assigned Revenues to administer the revenues in September, 1790. Col. Macleod was appointed to supervise the collection of revenues in the Madurai country for the first time. In March, 1791 he enhanced the Ramnad peshcush to Rs. 1, 20,000. Sethupathi appeared to be quite satisfied with the arrangement and obtained a sum for the current year. In A.D. 1792, Ramnad country was ceded by a treaty to the British

¹¹⁷M.C., 1794, Vol.45, p.198.

¹¹⁸M.C., 1794 Vol.44, p.327.

¹¹⁹M.C., 1794, Vol.45, p.28.

¹²⁰P.D., to England, 1795, Vol.2, p.43.

government who sent Col.Martinz with forces to occupy the country to maintain order and levy the annual tribute punctually from the Sethupathi. The Company promptly despatched a force led by Col.Martinz to occupy the country. Martin occupied a bungalow in the heart of the town, on the bank of Mugavai Urani.¹²¹ Ramanathapuram was fromall occupied. This step was taken to put down any disaffection that might crop up.

As his intimacy with the colonel increased, he grew haughty and arrogant. The Sethupathi thought it politic to dismiss Muthu Irulappa Pillai,¹²²and appoint Muthu Kumarappa Pillai.¹²³ Muthu Irulappa Pillai however was soon ascribed in the services of the East India Company in the capacity of 'renter of British revenue'. It should be pointed out that the treaty of 1792 established only an indirect control of the Company over Ramanathapuram. But the latter events show that the Company did not have any intention of leaving Sethupathi with even minor powers. So after three years the Company for reasons not clear, deposed Muthramalinga Sethupathi. The Sethupathi showed a disposition to rebel against the government and the board rebuked the collector in rather strong terms for delaying to report to them the rebellious conduct of the zamindar. A letter from E. Sanders, President of the Revenue Board dated 18thFebruary, 1795, to the Collector Powney, refers to the deposition of the Sethupathi and to the question of succession, but fails to give any clue as to the immediate cause for the deposition. In the absence of any concrete evidence it can be said that the consolidation programme of the Company after theirvictory in the Anglo-French conflict which kept them preoccupied all these years.

¹²¹This building still extant bears the name Sankara Vilas in this military dress with his pottey officers and the Sethupathi withqueen can be seen in the Sethupathi Palace. "Ramalingvilasam".

¹²²Kamal, S.M., op.cit.,p. 66.

¹²³Monoharan. Mee., op. cit., p. 147.

According to local traditions it is said that the Sethupathi was secretly supporting the rebel Poligar, Kattabomman of Panjalankurichi.¹²⁴

The Collector Powney sent Muthu Irulappa Pillai, the former *pradhani* to conduct an enquiry and Sethupathi was deposed in 1795. The correspondence that went on between the Collector and the Revenue Board revealed that the Company had successfully applied the dictum to divide at Impera by getting themselves involved in the intrigues of Sethupathi's management. When the succession question came up they 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 Mangaleswari Nachiar¹²⁵ but it took eight long 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. Though the administration of Sethupathis came to an unceremonious end their socio-political, economic and cultural legacy continued to gather momentum.

¹²⁴Katabomman the Poligar of Panjalankurichi and the moving spirit behind the Poligar risings of Tinnevely success fully defied the company for 7 years until he was captured and hanged in October 1801.

¹²⁵Lord Hobert in Council, 4th July 1795, Revenue Consultations, Vol.64, pp. 241-255.