

# **Land, Power and Society in Ramnad under Colonial Rule: A.D. 1803 – A.D. 1910**

*Thesis submitted to Pondicherry University in partial fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the award of the Degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy  
in History

By  
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**Under the Guidance of  
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## CERTIFICATE

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled, *Land, Power and Society in Ramnad under Colonial Rule: A.D. 1803 – A.D. 1910*, submitted to the Pondicherry University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in History, is a record of research carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of **Dr. G. Chandhrika**, Professor, Department of History, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or any other similar title. It is an independent research work undertaken by me.

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## Introduction

In the ancient period Ramnad<sup>1</sup> was known as *Mugavainagaram*, meaning the town which is located near the seashore. This town was later well known as Ramanathapuram after the name of the god Ramanathasamy of Rameswaram temple, where according to legends, Rama, the avatar of God Vishnu worshiped God Siva. Ramnad, one of the coastal regions of southern most Tamil country, was the homeland of the *Maravans*<sup>2</sup> or warrior community. Historically, Ramanathapuram was part of the Pandyamandalam or the country of the Pandyas who ruled from Madurai during the Early Historic period. A territory under the later Pandyas until the tenth century, Madurai was conquered by Paranthaka Chola I who defeated the Pandya king Rajasimha II. Thereafter the territory remained under the control of the Cholas for about two centuries, recaptured by the imperial Pandyas in 1210. Civil war and fratricide in the Pandya kingdom led to the intervention and invasion of the Khalji general Malik Kafur, followed by a brief period of Muslim rule when representatives of the Delhi Sultanate ruled Pandya territory as Mabar or Madurai Sultanate in the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> After the Muslim rule Madura country passed under the control of Vijayanagara Empire. Vijayanagara ruler Krishna Devaraya (1509-1530) appointed Visvanatha Nayak (1529 - 1564) to supervise the occupied Madura territory, Visvanatha is considered as the founder of the Nayak rule<sup>4</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup>Ramnad, the anglicized version of Ramanathapuram, came into usage in the parlance of the British officials and the records of the English East India Company. It is continued occasionally even after the independence. As the present study deals with Colonial rule from 1803 to 1910 and is mainly based on the official British records the name Ramnad is used throughout the work except in the introductory part where the precolonial history of the place is traced

<sup>2</sup> Maravans mostly found in Ramnad region, southern part of Pudukottai state and western part of Tinnevely district. Nicholas B Dirks, "The Past of a Palayakkar: the Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4 no. 4, (August 1982), 659

<sup>3</sup> A. Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram* (Madras: Government Press, 1972), 5.

<sup>4</sup> The Nayak rule in Madura country extended over the present districts of Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Coimbatore, Salem, Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram and some portions of Tiruvananthapuram

southern Tamil Country.<sup>5</sup> The decline of the Vijayanagar rulers saw the establishment of Nayak kingdoms in Madura, Trichinopoly, Tanjore and Ginji. According to J.H. Nelson and H.R. Pate, Muthu Krishnappa Nayak (1602-09) the ruler of Madura, installed in Ramanathapuram the *Marava* dynasty of the Setupathi<sup>6</sup>, to protect the pilgrims to Rameswaram. Moreover, Muthu Krishnappa Nayak wanted to prevent Portuguese expansion in the coastal region. He tried to establish a powerful ruler in the coast to repel the Portuguese entry into Madura country. It is considered as the main reason behind the creation of *Marava* rule in Ramanathapuram territory in the beginning of seventeenth century (1605).<sup>7</sup> In 1605, Muthu Krishnappa appointed Sadaika Tevar Udayan Setupathi (1605-1621) as the guardian of pilgrims to and from the Rameswaram temple.<sup>8</sup>

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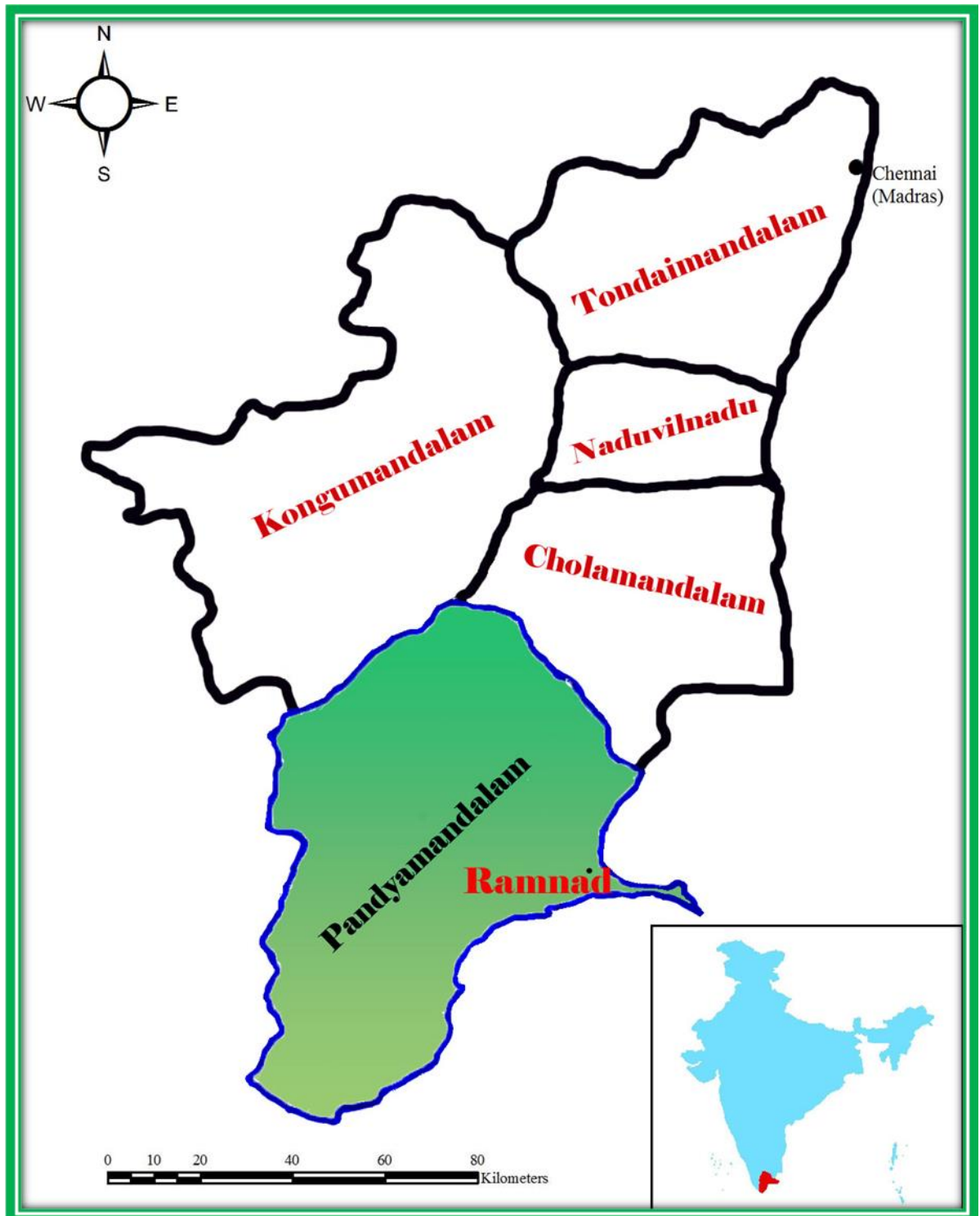
<sup>5</sup> R. Sathyanatha Aiyer, *History of the Nayaks of Madura* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1924), 52-57; Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Different spell used by Scholars and Historians, here researcher using the spelling of Setupathi which used in the Board of Revenue records. Setupathi, the hereditary title of the Raja of Ramnad, meant guardians of the Sethu or Adam's Bridge, *Tamil Lexicon*, Vol III, Part I, (Madras: University of Madras, 1982), 1630.

<sup>7</sup> Sathyanatha Aiyer, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 92; N. Subramaniyan, *Social and Cultural History of Tamil Nadu A.D 1336 -1984 A.D* (Udumalpet: 1991) 86; Robert Sewell and S. Thiruvenkatachari opined that Sadaika Tevar was appointed as ruler of Ramnad in 1604; Robert Sewell, *A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India* (Madras: Government Press, 1883), 89; S. Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupathis of Ramnad* (Karaikudi: Department of Extension Services Dr. Alagappa Chettiar Training College, 1959), 17.

<sup>8</sup> S. Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas 1700 – 1802* (Madurai: Madurai Publishing House, 1977), 21.

**Map 1: South Indian *Mandalams*, A.D. 1300**



Source: Burton Stein, “Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country”

*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 37, 1, (November 1997): 19.

A clear picture of the history about Ramnad country emerges from the seventeenth century onwards after the appointment of Sadaika Tevar by Muthu Krishnappa Nayak to protect pilgrims from the threat of robbers. Further, Muthu Krishnappa ordered that the Sadaika Tevar was to be the chief of all seventy-two Poligars. Sadaika Tevar, a descendant of the ancient Setupathi, was crowned as Sadaika Tevar Udayan Setupathi at Pogalur<sup>9</sup>, a village ten miles to the west of Ramnad. Kilavan Setupathi (1674-1710) then transferred capital from Pogalur to Ramanathapuram.<sup>10</sup> During this period Ramanathapuram was covered by jungle and each village had a fort and a lot of uncultivated land. There is no recorded evidence to ascertain the territory bestowed under the control of Setupathis during the initial setting up of the Ramanathapuram kingdom, It can be assumed that Sadaika Tevar<sup>11</sup> was appointed to control the territory of Ramanathapuram, Pattamangalam, Kalayarkoil, Tiruvadanai and Sivaganga which areas are found in proximity to Rameswaram temple.<sup>12</sup>

James Burgess, who studied the inscriptions of Ramanathapuram Setupathis, observed that before the beginning of the seventeenth century historical records are not mentioning the Setupathis.<sup>13</sup> The *Sethu* is called by the British as ‘Adam’s bridge’. Setupathis were known as guardians of the cause-way to Rameswaram.<sup>14</sup> The need and necessity to form Ramanathapuram domain occurred in the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Nayaks decided to divide their territory in to seventy-two

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<sup>9</sup> Spelt differently as ‘Bogalur’ by S. Thiruvenkatachari and ‘Pogalore’ by T.Raja Ram Rao. J.H. Nelson uses ‘Pokalur’. The researcher uses the spelling of ‘Pogalur’ as spelt by A. Ramasamy.

<sup>10</sup> *Board of Revenue*, No.3198, dated 21.12.1882, 7. J.H. Nelson, *The Madura Country A Manual* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1989), 109-110; H. R. Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I (Madras: Government Press, 1917), 62.

<sup>11</sup> T. Raja Ram Rao’s *Ramnad Manual*, 1891, spells it as ‘Dever’, whereas the researcher uses ‘Tevar’ as spelt used in *Board of Revenue* records and used by Robert Sewell and Pamela G. Price

<sup>12</sup> Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupathis of Ramnad*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Sewell, *A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 10.

*palayams* for the convenience of administration. The Poligari<sup>15</sup> or *palayam* system was originally introduced by Visvanatha Nayak (1529 - 1564). Under the system *palayam* meant a territorial division. The holders of the *palayam* were known as the *Palayakarar* or Poligar. The British records show that there were three regional divisions of poligars; firstly, the Tamilnadu poligars named as southern poligars, secondly, the Rayalaseema poligars or western poligars and thirdly, poligars of coastal Andra named as northern poligars. Tinnevelly, Ramanathapuram, Madura, Dindigul and Trichinopoly were important *palayams* in the division of southern poligars.<sup>16</sup> Muthu Krishnappa Nayak designated the Setupathi of Ramanathapuram as the chief of all the southern *palayams*. Among the seventy-two *palayams*, Ramanathapuram was the largest one. A number of *palayams* emerged powerful in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Tinnevelly, Madura, Ramanathapuram, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Dindigul and Coimbatore were the major *palayams*. The *palayams* to the western side of Tinnevelly, Sivaganga and the Ramanathapuram *palayam* were ruled by the *Maravan* caste<sup>17</sup> and Madura, Trichinopoly and Tanjore *palayakarars* belonged to *Kallan* caste. The chieftains of eastern Tinnevelly, Dindigul and Coimbatore *palayams* belonged to the Tottiyar or Kambalattan of Nayakkan community. The total numbers of *palayams* were frequently changing. During the reign of Visvanatha Nayak totally seventy-two *palayams* were created in the Madura country. Under the Nawabs of Arcot the number was reduced to around sixty in 1752. By the end of the eighteenth century the number of *palayams* was about forty six in

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<sup>15</sup> Poligar means the 'holder of the territory' and literally the *palayam* means 'armed camp'. The word for armed camp is *palayam* in Tamil, *palamu* in Telugu and *pollam* in English. Robert Caldwell, *A History of Tinnevelly* (New Delhi: Madras: Government Press, 1881), 58.

<sup>16</sup> K. Rajayyan, *Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu* (Madras: University of Madras, 1974), vi.

<sup>17</sup> Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga rulers belong the Sembunattu clan of Maravans; Nicholas B Dirks. 'The Past of a Palayakarar: the Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4, No. 4, (1982): 661.

the Carnatic provinces.<sup>18</sup> Setupathis emerged as powerful among the southern *palayams* in the end of seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> Setupathis proved their loyalty to the Madura Nayaks when the latter were in a critical situation. Thereafter Setupathis emerged as protectors of the Nayak Kingdom. When there was weakness of central power, Setupathis declared themselves as independent rulers<sup>20</sup> in the second half of the seventeenth century during the period of Kilavan Setupathi (1674-1710).<sup>21</sup> Kilavan Setupathi formed Pudukkottai from part of Ramanathapuram and gave it to his wife Kathali's brother, who belonged to the Kallan caste and henceforth ruled Pudukkottai as Rangunatha Raja Thondaiman in 1686 A.D.<sup>22</sup> Under these circumstances started the disintegration of Ramanathapuram kingdom. Ramanathapuram territory was further divided into five divisions by Kattaiah Tevar or Kumara Muthu Vijaya Rangunatha Setupathi (1729-1735). He kept three parts with him and the remaining parts were given to Sasivarna Tevar<sup>23</sup> who was named Raja Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Periya Udaya Tevar. These two parts constituted the new domain known as Sivaganga in 1730 A.D.,<sup>24</sup> which was called as *Chinna vadagai* (small revenue division) as Ramanathapuram was called as *Periya vadagai* (large revenue division). Sasivarna Tevar was recognized as the ruler of Sivaganga from

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<sup>18</sup> K. Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu: A Real History* (Trivandrum: 2005), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> In 1707 A.D Ramanathapuram Kingdom, declared its independence under Kilavan Setupathi.

<sup>21</sup> Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupathis of Ramnad*, 17-29

<sup>22</sup> S.M. Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal* (Ramanathapuram: Sharmila Publishers, 1992), 399.

<sup>23</sup> According to Robert Sewell, Sasivarna Tevar married Akhilandeswari Nachiyar, the illegitimate daughter of Kumara Muthu Vijaya Rangunatha Setupathi. Sewell, *A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> According to J.H. Nelson Sivaganga was separated from Ramnad in 1733A.D. J.H. Nelson p.250; W.W. Hunter stated that in 1729 Sivaganga was formed from Ramnad; W.W. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. IX (London: Trubner & Co, 1886) p.124

1730 to 1750 A.D.<sup>25</sup> At the same time Pudukkottai was declared its independence under Vijaya Rangunatha Thondaiman, son of Rangunatha Raja Thondaiman.<sup>26</sup>

The southern part of the Mughal Empire was known as Carnatic and Arcot was its headquarter. In 1731 A.D Ramanathapuram came under the control of Chanda Sahib, Nawab of Arcot. Later this region was in the hands of Marathas, and in 1744 A.D under the supremacy of Hyderabad Nizam. During the period of Anwarudhin, Nawab of Arcot (1743-49) there was a civil war between Navayats and Wallajas of Arcot. The internal disputes, disunity and political disturbance of the southern region paved the way for European powers who eagerly entered into the internal politics of Southern India. The Carnatic wars created a favorable situation for the British to enter and the establish supremacy in southern India. From 1795 onwards the East India Company<sup>27</sup> began its political control over the Carnatic region.<sup>28</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century (1801) the Company emerged as a dominant power with the Nawab as a nominal ruler of southern Tamil region. In 1802 the British extended the Permanent Settlement in parts of the Madras Presidency<sup>29</sup> and introduced the Zamindari land revenue in the place of the *Palayam* system. The Company

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<sup>25</sup> K. Mangayarkarasi, *Marudhupandyar: Varalarum Vazhimurayum* (Chennai: Buddha Publications, 2003), 63.

<sup>26</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, 67; Sewell, *A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Hereafter the Company

<sup>28</sup> S.C. Bhatt (ed.) *The Encyclopedic District Gazetteers of India* Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Gyam Publishing House, 2005), 1210.

<sup>29</sup> The Madras Presidency had twenty-one districts, such as Godavari, Kistna, Vizagapatnam, Ganjam, Cuddapah, Kurnool, Anantapur, Bellary, South Kanara, Malabar, Nilgiri, Tinnevely, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, South Arcot, North Arcot, Madura, Chinglepet, Nellore, Coimbatore and Salem; Dharma Kumar, 'Caste and Landless in South India,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, No. 3 (1962): 339-340.



consolidated the British bureaucratic power over southern Tamil country<sup>30</sup> during the late eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Company controlled and captured most of the little kingdoms in southern India and brought the poligars under their direct control. The poligars were designated as Zamindars with proprietary rights over land but dispossessed of arms and military power. In the Madras Presidency the Zamindari system was initially introduced in the Chingleput district (1802) and later it was tried in Ramnad and other parts of the southern Tamil region. Ramnad was one of the largest revenue divisions in the Madura country during the period undertaken for the research study. The Ramnad Zamindari came into existence in 1803 A.D, and Rani Setupathi Mangaleswari Natchiar (1803-1807) was the first Zamindarini of Ramnad. The Zamindar's main duty was that of supervising land revenue, collecting revenue from land and to play an intermediate role under the district Collector and the Company. Studying about land, revenue from land and the administrative apparatus of revenue collection are essential for understanding agrarian society.

The Zamindars were the owners of the entire land and they leased land to tenants or Mirasidars for cultivation to get land rent. The Mirasidars kept some fertile land and gave the rest of the land for lease to peasants who could be considered as sub tenants. These sub tenants were peasants with means to maintain cultivation through the landless or under privileged castes. These social structures were created after the introduction of the permanent settlement. Earlier the poligars had supreme power and

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<sup>30</sup> Burton Stein used the term of 'southern Tamil country' which includes Madura, Ramnad, Pudukkottai, Sivaganga, Tinnevely and part of Travancore. Burton, Stein, "Circulation and Historical Geography of Tamil Country" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 37,1, (November 1977): 7-26.

there was no mediator between the ryot and chieftains. The zamindari system created new elite groups in the Ramnad Zamindari. The Maravans, Vellalans, Chetties, Nayakkans emerged as the major land holding and land owning castes whereas Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans landless and therefore oppressed castes. Chetties were moneylenders, traders and bankers and landowners in the Ramnad Zamindari. Shanans of Ramnad had migrated from Tinnevely and settled as traders in Ramnad in the eighteenth century. Nayakkans, Reddies and Vellalans were landowning non cultivating castes. They used *pannaiyal* and *padiyal* for cultivating their land. Kallans and Agambadiyans were the agricultural laborers of Brahmin or Vellalans land, some of the Agambadiyans were domestic servants of the Ramnad zamindars.

According to the *Ramnad Manual*, Pattunulkarars, Sedars, Kaikollar, Saliars and Saluppars were the non cultivating groups who were weavers of Ramnad. Kammalars or goldsmiths were also called as Karuman, Kannars and Sirpi. The Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans were the landless castes in the Ramnad Zamindari. They served as the *pannaiyal* and *padiyal* in the mirasidar's land. Vellalans were the landowning caste and they performed official service like *karnam* or accountant of the zamindars. The *pannaiyal* and *padiyal* mostly the Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans castes depended on the Vellalan's land. The Company had indirect control over the entire Zamindari, but Zamindar of Ramnad had direct power to control the social order. Apart from the control of Zamindars the Mirasidar or tenants had limited control through land owning rights. The sub tenants and landless peasants struggled to survive the domination of the elite group. Both the Company and the Zamindars were eager to get more land revenue without any consideration for the people or the peasant. Land rights and land holding power made

the wealthy people like Maravans, Vellalans, Reddies, Chetties, Nayakkans to dominate the marginalized people or landless peoples like Pallans and Paraiyans in the Ramnad Zamindari.

Historical knowledge about the past is always being constructed, revisited and reconsidered with a fresh look into the available sources. Not many works are available on local or micro level regional history of Southern India for understanding the real picture and nature of the society, especially to understand socio-economic aspects of the Ramnad Zamindari. In that way the present work concentrated on Ramnad in the southern coastal region to know about rural society and economy from 1803 to 1910.

The period (1803-1910) had witnessed major changes in the social and agrarian order of the Ramnad Zamindari. During the eighteenth century local chieftains of little kingdoms were involved in disputes among neighboring domains to maintain their political supremacy. But, after the establishment of the political ascendancy of the Company, the local chieftains, devoid of political supremacy, continued to struggle for social and economic dominance in the region throughout the nineteenth century. After the assumption of power by the Company, most of the local chieftains or little kings came under British control. The Poligars, who were previously the controller of the lands, were transformed into Zamindars and thus land owners in the local region. The beginning of nineteenth century witnessed great changes in the land administration of the Madras Presidency, where the British introduced Permanent Settlement in some parts based on the model of the Bengal Presidency. In 1910 Ramnad was formed a separate district, combining Ramnad Zamindari areas with some parts from Madura and Tinnevely districts. After the

district formation the landscape and economy of Ramnad became different. The period from 1803 to 1910 was a crucial period as the introduction of Zamindari affected the agrarian sector in several ways that the period after 1910 witnessed transformation of power in the Ramnad Zamindari. Therefore, the researcher has taken 1803 to 1910 as the period of research study.

Historians have studied at length about the establishment and consolidation of British rule in different regions of India. Nicholas B. Dirks gives the concept of “Hollow Crown” in his analysis of kingship in the princely state of Pudukkottai in South India. Pamela G. Price, on the other hand, refutes Dirks’s idea of a ‘hollow’ kingship in favor of one based on political control in her study of Ramnad and Sivaganga in south India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nicholas B. Dirks views the native kings as Hallowed Crowns, given the subordinate status of princely states in Colonial India. Pamela G. Price disagreed with this outlook. She had located the political practice of princely states in the context of the native traditions of kingship. Scholars and experts studied and mainly focused on political authority and legitimacy. The present work attempts to explore the introduction of the Zamindari settlement and its impact on agrarian relations in the Ramnad Zamindari and understand the contested succession to the Zamindari<sup>31</sup> of Ramnad and land litigation cases, filed in the court of Madura Country and how competitions for landownership led to religious and caste conflicts in the Ramnad Zamindari. The study mainly deals about holding, owning and controlling of land in Ramnad under the Zamindari tenure during 1803 to 1910. What were the political circumstances and economic requirements of the Company government to introduce the Zamindari settlement in the

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<sup>31</sup> After the introduction of the Permanent Settlement or Zamindari tenure in the southern Tamil country, the settled *palayams* were known as Zamindari or Estate or *Samasthanam*. These three terms indicated the same position of its nature.

Madras Presidency? After the introduction of permanent settlement, what was the role of zamindars in their respective revenue divisions? How did the Zamindars maintain their power and supremacy in their territory? In what manner did rights of landownership impacted on economic and social conditions in the Ramnad Zamindari? What was the condition of landless and underprivileged people in Ramnad? What were the reasons behind the religious conversion and social transformation that took place in the Ramnad Zamindari during the period from 1803 to 1910? What were the causes and necessity for the conversion and migration of people of Ramnad? These research questions are discussed in the present work.

### **Statement of the problem**

The formation of Ramanathapuram domain under the Setupathis occurred during the period of Muthu Krishnappa Nayak (1602-1609) in the beginning of the seventeenth century (1605). Due to the weakness of the Nayaks it flourished as an independent kingdom under the Setupathis. Arcot Nawab's agreement and political settlement with the Company brought southern Tamil country under the Company's government in the beginning of nineteenth century (1801). The end of the Poligar wars and the Company's suppression of the Poligars created a new political and administrative system in the southern Tamil country. The present work, studies about land holding, land owning, agrarian relations and social transformation under British rule in Ramnad Zamindari from 1803 to 1910. During this period due to the introduction of Zamindari system there were significant changes in the society and economy of Ramnad. The present research explores how changes in land ownership and land rights impacted on pre existing stratification of society and caste hierarchy, strengthening the economic power and supremacy of the landed castes over the

landless castes. Its analyses the causes for social imbalance and the resulting communal conflicts and investigates the reasons behind religious conversion in the Ramnad Zamindari.

### **Objectives**

The present work has the following objectives:

1. To understand about colonial rule and its policy towards the Ramnad Zamindari from 1803 to 1910.
2. To describe the introduction and impact of zamindari settlement on peasants and agrarian groups in the Ramnad Zamindari.
3. To explore social stratification in the Ramnad Zamindari during 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the twentieth century.
4. To analyze changes in land holding and landowning rights and the economic supremacy of elite groups in the social structure.
5. To examine the land revenue settlement of the British government and the consequent social transformation and social imbalance in the Ramnad Zamindari.
6. To understand the cause and reasons behind the religious conversion and communal conflict in the Ramnad Zamindari from 1803 to 1910.

## Scope of the study

The research explores land, power and society in Ramnad from the introduction of the Zamindari System (1803) to the formation of the separate district of Ramnad (1910). The Madura country of the Madras Presidency had included the revenue divisions of Madura, Trichinopally, Dindigul, Pudukkottai, Tanjore, Tinnevelly, part of Travancore, Ramnad and Sivaganga. According to C.S Srinivasachari, Ramnad, Sivaganga and Pudukkottai were 'like adopted children of the Madura Government'.<sup>32</sup> Ramnad was bounded on the northern side by Sivaganga, Pudukkottai and Tanjore, on the eastern side by Palks strait and Gulf of Mannar and by Tinnevelly district on the southern side. The Thirumangalam taluk of Madura district and Sivaganga constituted the boundaries on the western side of the Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>33</sup> Ramnad a revenue taluk of the Company (from 1803 to 1910) until 1910 was formed in that year as a separate district including a portion of Madura and Tinnevelly districts. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Ramnad was subdivided into seventeen taluks<sup>34</sup>. After 1858 it was grouped into three divisions, namely Southern division or *Therkuvattagai*, Northern division or *Vadakkuvattagai* and Central divisions. In 1873 the three groups were enlarged to form six taluks: Ramnad, Muthukulathur, Kamudi, Pallimadam, Rajasingamangalam and Hanumanthagudi. During the modification of the taluks of Ramnad there were no changes in the territorial boundaries. The present research mainly deals the taluks of Ramnad as revenue division under the Madura country from 1803 to 1910.

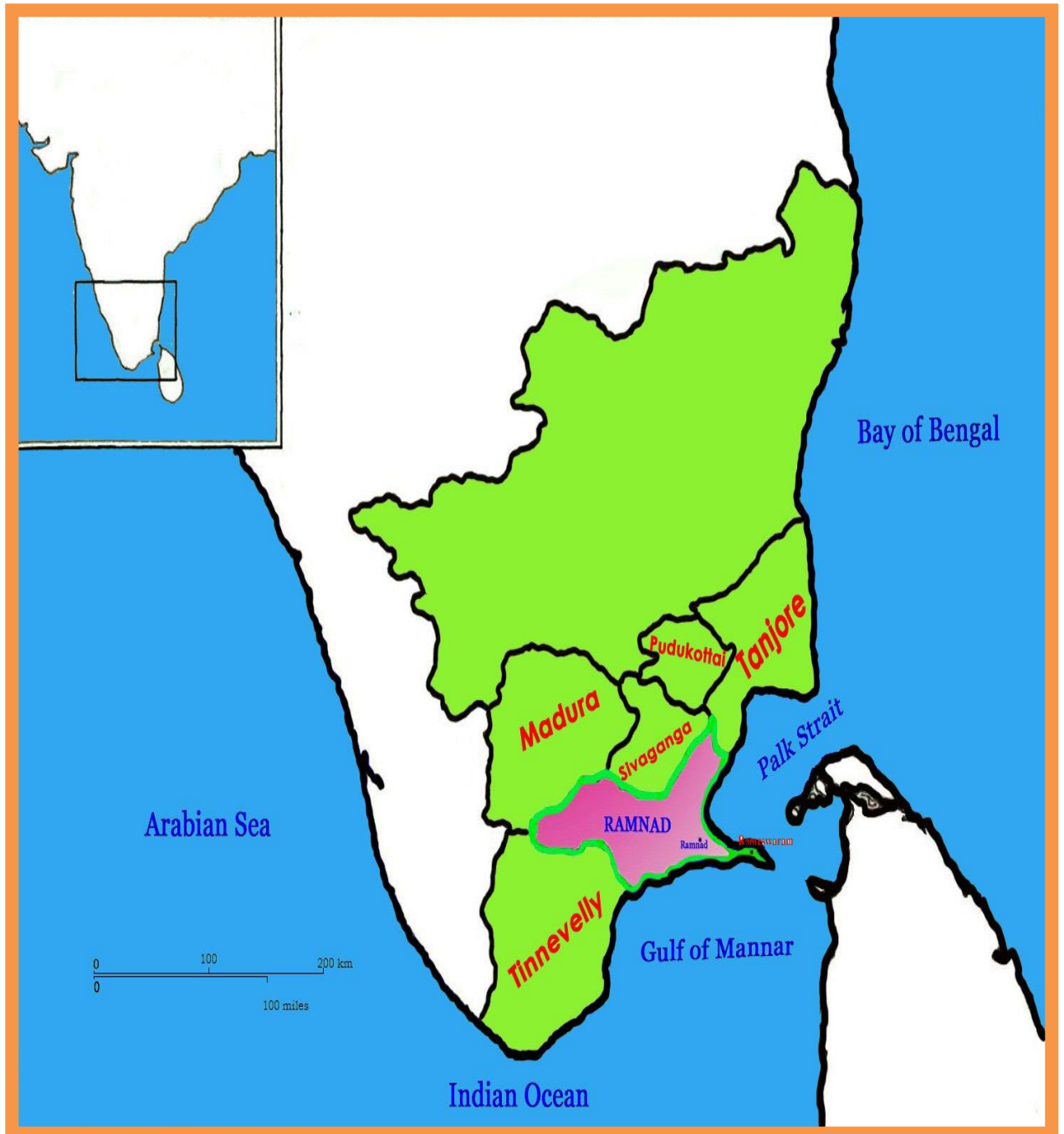
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<sup>32</sup> C.S. Srinivasachari, 'The Poligar system in Tamil country: Its origin and growth,' *Indian Historical Records Commission*, eleventh meeting held at Nagpur, Vol. XI December, 1928 (Calcutta: Government Press, 1929), 102.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from T. Raja Ram Rao, Manager, Ramnad Estate to Collector of Madura dated 5th February 1882 No. 24

<sup>34</sup> The Seventeen taluks of the Ramnad Zamindari discussed in Chapter 1

**Map 2: Study Area**



Source: Pamela G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).



## **Limitations and Delimitations**

The present work is limited to the period from 1803 to 1910. This work mainly focuses on land control and its impact on Ramnad Zamindari. It does not include a study of political events but deals with land and land related issues in the Ramnad Zamindari, religious conversion and caste conflict. It gives the details about the Poligari system which emerged and played a major role in the eighteenth century to understand the transition from Poligari to Zamindari system in the southern Tamil region under colonial rule.

## **Review of Literature**

*The Hollow Crown: Ethno History of Indian Kingdom* (1989) by Nicholas B. Dirks, explains the emergence and administration of the little kingdom of Pudukkottai and the status of hollow crown under the Company and the British colonial rule. He analyses the ambiguous political status of the princely state of Pudukkottai and uses the symbol of ‘Hollow Crown’ to indicate the Pudukkottai Raja’s political authority without concurrent powers. The present work adopts his idea of hollow crown as regards the political status of the Ramnad Zamindari and analyses how Ramnad Zamindars tried to maintain their social status and economic independence unsuccessfully. *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, (1996), by Pamela G. Price explains the pre-colonial regime in the southern Tamil country especially in Ramnad and Sivaganga and the changes in political practice from the late seventeenth century to the late twentieth Century. She discusses about Ramnad and Sivaganga, neighboring little kingdoms in the eighteenth century, both ruled by Marava warrior clans. She analyses in detail about the rise of the Maravans and their strength and power in this region. She opposed Dirk’s concept of ‘Hollow crown’ and gave

examples to prove her views of the superior powers of Zamindars. According to her Zamindars had authority in their zamin and continued to have a high status like getting *muthal mariyathai* or *ur mariyathai* in temple rituals and conducting grand festivals to prove their social supremacy. The present work explores the power and nature of Zamindari in Ramnad and the feeble attempts of the Ramnad Zamindars to maintain a semblance of social status as they lacked complete control over land and land revenue.

A study of the impact of colonial revenue policy on a micro level society and social order is provided by Anand Yang in his *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920* (1989). Taking a single district, Saran in Bihar province, Yang makes out a case for a “Limited Raj” of the British as the colonial administration depended on the collaborative support of the rural elite, especially the Hathwa Raja, whose rise to prominence was aided by the British. Reinforced by colonial support, the landed class emerged as successful rentiers utilizing the commercialized market economy, their network of social control and the legal apparatus of the colonial government to establish their dominance over the peasantry. However, Yang has chosen to ignore the crucial role played by the caste system in the economy, wealth, power and prestige of a rural society. In contrast, David West Rudner’s *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (1992) is about the merchant banking caste of Nattukottai Chettiars of southern Tamil Nadu whose commercial activities and networks had spread beyond the seas in South East Asia as well. Rudner considers caste as a form of symbolic capital and describes how prestige, reputation and social relationships along with caste provide useful non tangible forms of capital in the deployment of material

capital. Primarily a study of capitalism, Rudner's analysis of the intricate connections among social institutions like caste, kinship, marriage, religious practices and political institutions stresses a political economic approach. However, Rudner's work concentrates on merchant capitalism and commercial activities leaving out landlordism and agricultural activities which form the backbone of rural economy.

*Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century* (1992) by Dharma Kumar examines the role of Indian agricultural workers in the Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century and also described the importance of agricultural labor in the first half of the nineteenth century. She gives accounts of the land, population, migration and growth of agricultural labor in the Madras Presidency in the nineteenth century. David Ludden's *Peasant History in South India* (1985), analyses how irrigation, marketing and worship came to shape the economic and cultural landscape of the Tinnevely district, in the Madras Presidency. He bestowed more attention to agrarian conditions and the role of villages in Indian History. He focuses on the peasant as the centre of the social historiography of the agrarian civilization of South India. Particularly, he discusses the classification of land on the basis of soil and points out to migration as an important social factor which shaped the history of the Tinnevely district. David Mosse's *The Rule of Water Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India* (2003) bestows attention on the water management and rights of the two zamindari areas, Ramnad and Sivaganga in southern India. He examines water rights or *neer urimai* and its impact on the state and social order in the two zamindaries of Ramnad and Sivaganga from nineteenth and late twentieth century. His main focus is on how tanks and the water management system intersected with the political power of the

state and social changes in southern India. David Mosse does not touch upon land ownership rights and their impact on the social order. The present research deals with land rights and its impact on the socio economic structure of the Ramnad Zamindari, especially how the transition from Poligari to Zamindari affected the peasants in a socially stratified society after the implementation of the Company's land revenue policy.

*Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu* (1955) by K. Rajayyan explains how the poligars represented an influential institution in the polity of Tamil Nadu from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, emerged as a powerful factor under the Vijayanagar empire, flourished and struggled through until they vanished from the stage of history after the failure of the South Indian Rebellion of 1802. This work gives a clear picture about the origin of the Poligari system in a detailed manner. K. Rajayyan had focused on the relations between rebel poligars and ruling powers, the causes of the decline of the Nayaks and Poligar wars and also explained about the fall of Ramnad and Sivaganga. He explained about the British reorganization of the Poligari system. S. Thiruvengkatachari's *The Setupathis of Ramnad* (1959) gives a chronological account of Setupathis of Ramnad from seventeenth century to first half of the twentieth century. He narrates the origin of the Maravans in a detailed manner. Thiruvengkatachari's work mainly focused to give a brief history about the history of the Setupathis from Sadaika Tevar to Raja Shanmuga Rajeswara Setupathi of Ramnad zamin. Rajayyan's work examines the end and ruin of the Poligars of the southern Tamil country, S. Thiruvengkatachari's work is mainly about the political history of Ramnad, whereas the present work concentrates on the social and economic history of Ramnad after the rebellion and defeat of the Poligars.

Robert Hardgrave's *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (1969) gives the entire history of the Shanans or Nadars<sup>35</sup>, in the nineteenth century. In his work he describes about the caste structure in India and discusses the conditions and traditional status of the Shanans. He brings out how the Shanans, as toddy-tappers or climbers of the Palmyra tree, considered by the so called high caste Hindus in the early nineteenth century to be among the most defiling and degraded of all castes, suffered severe social disabilities, and came to be considered as the economically depressed community in the Tamil country. Then he describes their conversion to Christianity and the changes in their status in society after their conversion to Christianity. He also highlights about the formation of associations like the Nadar Mahajana Sangam (1910) and its contribution towards progress of Shanans in the twentieth century. Hardgrave's work focuses mainly Shanans in six towns of Ramnad district, after its formation in 1910 namely Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Tirumangalam, Sattagudi, Palayampatti and Aruppukottai. His work does not touch upon the Shanans of Kamudi, their conflict with Maravans and the causes for the rivalry between Maravans and Shanans in Ramnad Zamindari from 1803 to 1910.

S. Kadhivel's *A History of the Maravas 1700 – 1802* (1977) emphasizes on the early history of the Maravan community in the southern Tamil country. The conflicts of the Maravas with the Nayaks of Madura, the Marathas, the Nawab of the Carnatic and the British were narrated. The relations of the Maravans with some of the powers in the south have been treated to provide a comprehensive account of the Maravas in the eighteenth century. He also describes the migration of the Maravas and their role in the society, especially their role in *kaval*, *sthalam kaval* and *desa*

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<sup>35</sup> The present Nadars of Tamil Nadu called as Shanans during the period of nineteenth century. Nadan and Gramani were caste title of Shanans. Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, P to S (Madras: Government Press, 1909), 367.

*kaval* systems. S. Kadhivel traces the history of Maravas until the rebellion of 1802 in southern Tamil country. *History of Tamil Nadu the Palayams* (2005) by G. Revathy and S. Varghes Jeyaraj's *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, (2010) narrate the administration, social and economic condition of the poligars of southern Tamil country and Zamindari system in Tamil Nadu with special reference to the Madurai district respectively. S.M. Kamal's *Setupathigal Sarithiram* (History of Setupathi kings) (2008), gives chronological study of Setupathis of Ramnad from seventeenth century to twentieth century. He narrates the political events and the importance of Setupathi and provides details about rule of the Setupathis with the help of copper plates and inscriptional sources. He gave more emphasis on political history of the Ramnad Setupathis since origin of Setupathis to twentieth century.

The existing literature, thus lays emphasis on the importance of political affairs and the early stages of the zamindars in the southern Tamil country. These works do not touch upon zamindari litigation, land and social issues of Ramnad Zamindari specifically from 1803 to 1910. There is no exact work on land and agrarian relations on Ramnad *samasthanam* or estate<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, the present work has undertaken a study of land and land related issues in Ramnad Zamindari from the beginning of the nineteenth century (1803) to first decade of the twentieth century (1910).

A few journal articles focus on social conflict and caste violence in Tinnevely district. K. A. Manikumar's 'Caste and Classes in South India'<sup>37</sup> examines the causes

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<sup>36</sup> According to the *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, "Estate" means - any permanently - settled estate, whether a zamindari, *jaghir*, *mitta* or *palayam*, *Report of the Madras Estates Land Act Committee*, Part I (Madras: Government of Madras, 1938), 279.

<sup>37</sup> K. A. Manikumar, 'Caste and Classes in South India,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, 36 (1997): 2242-43.

and aftermath of caste violence in the Tinnevelly District due to conflict between Maravans and Pallans in the twentieth century. This article explores the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination followed by the land owning castes and the caste disputes between the Maravans who owned land and Pallans, the agricultural laborers in the Tinnevelly district. Arun Bandopadhyay, in his article ‘The origin of a social conflict in South India: The Sivakasi riots of 1899’,<sup>38</sup> examines the economic imbalance which was the main cause for of the violent caste conflicts at Sivakasi and other places in Tamilnadu. He analyses the Sivakasi riot of 1899 between the Shanans and Maravans in the Tinnevelly district and points out how a ‘warrior’ caste, Maravans, losing its position in the old order, took to violence against ritual claims of a rising community (Shanans). He explains in detail about the origin, spread and organization of Sivakasi riots with special reference to communal conflict of Shanans and Maravans in the two taluks of Sattur and Srivilliputtur in northern Tinnevelly district. The present research work focuses on the causes of caste conflict in the Ramnad Zamindari and how land owning and holding rights affected the caste hierarchy and social order.

### **Hypotheses**

The present research proceeds on the following hypotheses.

- i. The introduction of permanent settlement created a new land owning group in Ramnad, attended by social and economic transformation.
- ii. The Setupathis of Ramnad were stripped of their political authority and were made Zamindars, collecting land rent and revenue for the Company.

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<sup>38</sup> Arun Bandopadhyay, ‘The origin of a social conflict in South India: The Sivakasi riots of 1899,’ *Studies in People's History* 1, 1 (2014): 69-80.

- iii. Landowning rights led to the emergence of a new elite group who attempted to maintain their social status, prestige and reputation.
- iv. The ownership of land, land holding rights and economic status were the major causes for the social imbalance that resulted in caste conflict in the Ramnad Zamindari.

### **Chapterisation**

The present research has four chapters excluding Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction outlines the theme of the research work, its objectives, scope of the study, review of literature, hypotheses, chapterization, sources and methodology, domain formation of Ramnad and social stratification, historical and geographical background of Ramnad Zamindari, The first chapter, entitled “**Colonial Rule and Ramnad: From Little Kingdom to Zamindari**”, examines how the Company entered the politics of Ramnad kingdom, assuming its control from the Nawab of Arcot. It discusses the significance of the treaties of 1781 and 1792 between the Nawab and British and how from 1795 onwards the British wrested the direct control over Ramnad. Further, the revolt of the Marudu brothers in 1801 and its impact on Ramnad are described in this chapter. The political circumstances for the introduction of the permanent settlement in Ramnad by 1803 and the subsequent establishment of the absolute power of the Company are analyzed. The chapter brings out the reduced status of the Setupathis as the nominal rulers of Ramnad under the Company and their transformation from chiefs of *palayams* into zamindars without political authority. This chapter highlights the Company’s land revenue policy and administration over Ramnad from 1803 to 1910.



**“Zamindari Tenure and Land Settlement in Ramnad Zamindari”** is the second chapter which deals with the introduction of zamindari tenure in the Madras Presidency based on the model of the Bengal Presidency. It discusses the land revenue system tried out in the Ramnad Zamindari to get more and regular income from land, the methods of revenue collection, currency and taxation implemented after the introduction of the permanent settlement. This chapter also explains how the British land revenue policy laid the foundation for the social hierarchical order based on the wealth of a community.

The third chapter entitled **“Power and Control of Land in Ramnad Zamindari”** brings out how the permanent settlement created the social order based on land control. Land rights and control created two major social divisions, namely, landowners and landless people. How the landowning castes emerged as the elite groups who dominated the society by their economic wealth is examined in this chapter. Further, it explores the manner in which the zamindars were involved in the revenue collection and their measures to control the tenants or mirasidars who had land holding rights from pre-colonial days in allotted areas. What was the role of zamindars to protect the ryot and which kind of issues like debt, litigation and ryot cases were faced by the zamindars and their administration are described in this chapter. The roles and functions of zamindars, *karnam* and *mirasidars* in assessing the land revenue and the struggle of the ryots for survival, the methods of torture and extortion used to collect tax from peasants are discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter, **“Economic Transformation, Religious Conversion and Social Legitimacy in Ramnad Zamindari”** analyzes the social and economic transformation that took place in the Ramnad zamindari. The mismanagement of the zamindars and government officials led to the migration of the people to other states

in order to survive the burden of taxation. The officials' over assessment of revenue and tyrannical collection of tax forced the peasant to mortgage or sell the land to money lenders or Chetties. The present chapter analyses how the Chetties or the money lending community emerged as the landowning caste in the second half of nineteenth century. Further it traces the migration to Ramnad of the Shanans who were considered as toddy tappers or *marameri* in the Tinnevely district. When they migrated to Ramnad for trading purpose they were transformed into trading communities. How the Shanans of Ramnad emerged and established their status in the nineteenth century and their religious conversion for gaining social mobility in the nineteenth century are explained in this chapter. This chapter focuses on the social and economic transformation that took place in Ramnad due to the British land revenue policy. Conclusion brings out the findings of the research.

### **Sources and Methodology**

The present research work makes an extensive use of both primary and secondary sources for understanding land, power and society in Ramnad under Colonial rule. Archival sources constitute the bulk of the primary sources, mostly British government official records, which include historical manuscripts, revenue consultancies, and Revenue reports. The *Report on the Administration of the Estate under the Court of Wards in the Madras Presidency 1890-1891* gives more details for understating the land revenue administration of Ramnad which came under the control of Court of Wards. Report of the *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Introduction to Vol III, Evidence taken in the Madras Presidency* (1928) and the *Report of the Commissioners for the investigation of alleged cases of Torture in the*

*Madras Presidency*, (1865) have been used extensively for studying about the problems, issues and torture faced by the peasants in Ramnad. The *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* part I & II (1938), *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statement* part I & II (1938), *Estate Land Act Committee Memoranda submitted to the Committee*, part I, II & III (1938), *Estate Land Act Committee Reports from Collectors* (1938) are the major sources to understand about the administration of the Madras Presidency after the introduction the permanent settlement. The *Administrative Reports of the Madras Presidency* is useful to know about the policies of the British. *S. R. Lushington's Report on Permanent Settlement 1802* provides to be valuable to know about the introduction of the permanent settlement in the southern Tamil country, especially in Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevely. The *Madura District records, Old Records of Madura Collectorate 1836-1854*, have been utilized to understand about the politics and administration of the Madura district. The *Native News Paper Reports* have been used to know public opinion about the administration of British rule in the Madras Presidency. The *Privy Council Reports* are used to study about the Ramnad Setupathis and their civil and revenue suits which were filed in the district courts and finally passed on to the London Privy Council for ultimate decision.

The *fifth Report from the Select Committee on the affairs of the East India Company*, Vol. I & II (1812) and Walter Kelley Firminger(ed), *Affairs of the East India Company Being the Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons 28th July 1812*, Vol III, were used to clarify the land revenue settlement of the southern *palayams* in a detailed manner. William Taylor's *Oriental Historical Manuscripts* Vol I & II (1835) gives the picture of history, mythology and antiquities

of southern Kingdoms. *Madras Land Revenue Reports, Revenue Consultancies, Board of Revenue Records*, Revenue documents of Ramnad were utilized for understanding the land revenue administration for the concerned period and area of study. P. Gnasundara Mudaliyar's *Notes on Permanent Settlement* (1940) has been used for the background of the introduction of the permanent settlement in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies. The *diary of Bhaskarasami Setupathi*, which documents of pieces of concernment of Raja of Ramnad gave the information on Baskarasami Setupathi and his day to day activities and the chronological events of History of Ramnad Setupathis.

The District manuals, unpublished theses, gazetteers, published works by prominent and eminent Indian and foreign historians have formed the Secondary sources. These secondary sources were used to fill in the gaps of this present work. Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India* (1855), W. Francis, *Madras District Gazetteer, Madura* (1906), H. R. Pate, *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer* (1917), B.S. Baliga, *Madras District Gazetteers Madurai*, (1960), A. Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram* (1972) and Manuals namely A. J. Stuart's *Manual of the Tinnevelly District in the Presidency of Madras* (1879), B.H. Baden Powell's *A Manual of the Land Revenue System and Land Tenure of British India* (1882), T. Raja Ram Row's *Ramnad Manual* (1891), S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar's *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency of British Administration* (1893), Joseph C. Houpert, *The Madura Mission Manual* (1916), C.D. Maclean's *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. I & II, (1989), J. H. Nelson's *The Madura Country: A Manual*, (1989) have been used to give a clear

picture of the society, economics, history and all other aspects of the Southern Tamil country.

S. Sundararaja Iyengar, *Land Tenures in the Madras Presidency* (1916) helped to provide a proper understanding of the various kinds of land tenure and land pattern followed in the Madras Presidency. The present research work uses descriptive and interpretative methods to bring out land control and socio economic transformation of Ramnad under colonial rule.

### **Agricultural Landscape of Ramnad**

#### **Total area of Ramnad Zamindari**

The Ramnad Zamindari is situated between latitude 9° 3' and 10° 2' and longitude 78° and 79°24'. The distance of Ramnad to Madura was sixty miles towards south. Ramnad is located in a dry coastal region with a hot and steamy climate. The months from March to June are the hottest months in this region.<sup>39</sup> According to the *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, the total area of Ramnad Zamindari was 2,351 square miles.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Soil condition of Ramnad**

Generally, the soil condition of Ramnad was unsatisfactory and unfit for agricultural production, as the region is mostly covered by sand. Ramnad soil consisted of six divisions, such as, *pottal* (unfertile land), *vandal* (ordinary clay with red colour land), *manal* (sandy), *karisal* (black cotton soil), *sevval* (light red soil) and

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<sup>39</sup> Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India* (Madras: Madras: Pharoah and Co, 1855), 410; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 23.

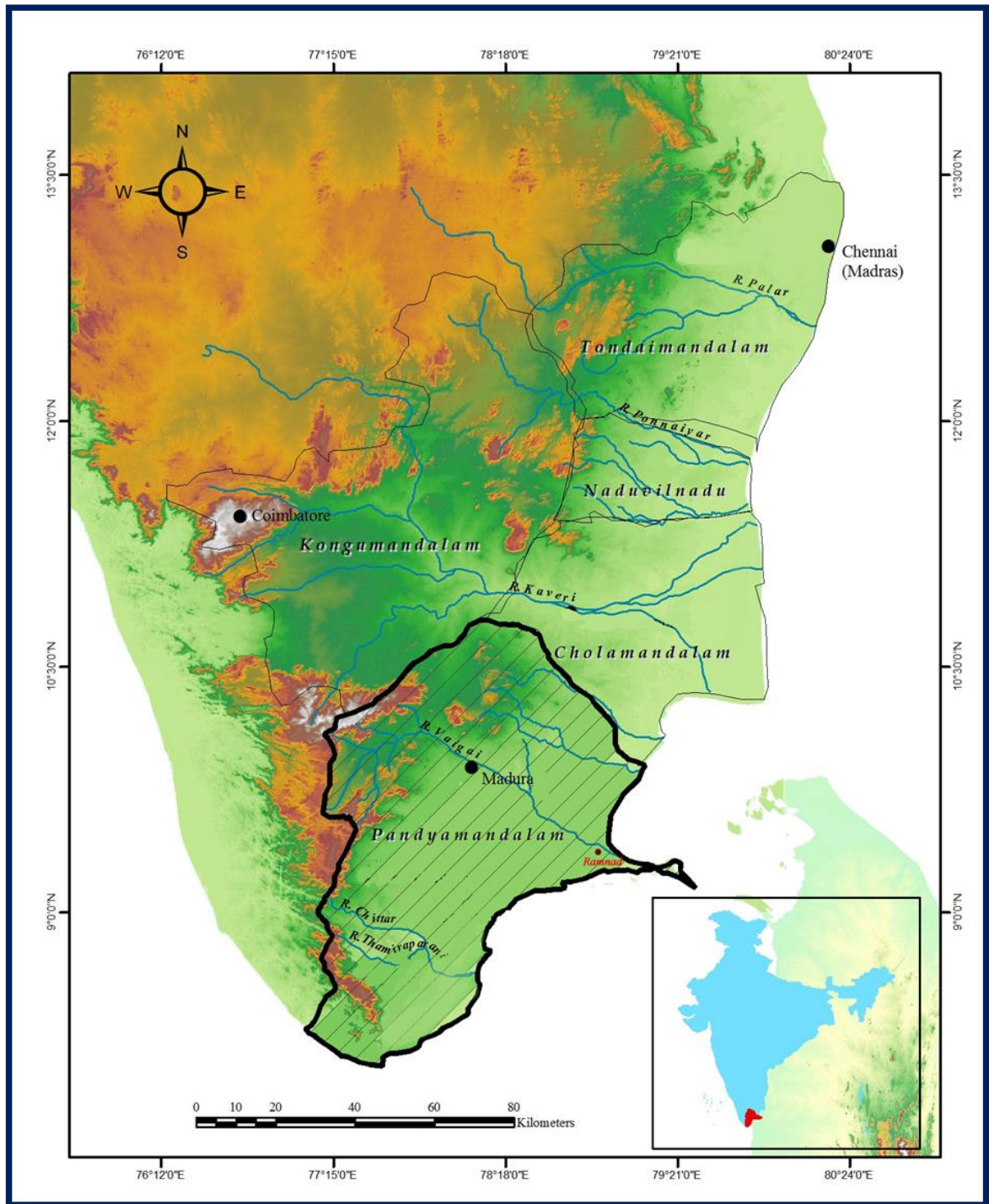
<sup>40</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II (Madras: Government Press, 1938): 124; According to C.D. Maclean, the total area of Ramnad estate was 2,112 square miles. C.D. Maclean, (ed.) *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. I (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1885), 56.

*veppal* (brown colour soil). The northern part of the Ramnad was full of *pottal* land and the eastern side *karisal* and western part of this zamindari covered by the *veppal* and *sevval* land. They allotted separate place for keeping the harvested paddy or other crops was called '*kalam*'.<sup>41</sup> Among these soil *karisal* and *vandal* soil were useful for the cultivation. The northern portion of the Ramnad zamin was covered by the soil of *pottal* and *vandal*. The Saligramam and Rajasingamangalam had the *vandal* and Arnuthimangalam contains the *pottal* lands. The eastern part of Ramnad was coastal land

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<sup>41</sup> *Board of Revenue*, No. 3198, dated 21.12.1882, 7.

Map 3: Physiographic map of South India



S. Manikandan, "Contest for Power and Legitimacy: Little kingdoms of Southern Tamil Country during the Eighteenth Century" (Ph.D thesis, Pondicherry University, 2013), 35.

fully covered by *manal* or sand. The southern part of Ramnad contains soil of *karisal*, *veppal* and *sevval*. The foremost western side was enclosed by *karisal*, *veppal* and *vandal* lands. The taluks of Pallimadam, Kamudi, Papankulam, Muthukulathur and Abiramam form the *karisal* lands. The soil of this part of Ramnad is not the rich kind of soil. The black soil made the western side of Ramnad. Coriander and Groundnut constituted the usual produce in the parts of Abiramam and Kamudi. Kamudi taluk consisted of *karisal*, *manal*, *seval* and *veppal* kinds of soil. The soil condition of the Pallimadam taluk was generally *karisal* and *veppal*. The north-eastern part of this taluk was covered with *manal*. The land pattern of the Hanumanthagudi taluk was that generally *pottal* land. *Vandal* and *manal* lands prevails in the coastal portion.<sup>42</sup>

The crop of the cultivating *punjai* land was known as *vanpayir*. Paddy was cultivated in the *nanjai* lands. This paddy cultivation was followed in the month of July and September when northeast monsoon starts in Ramnad. Two methods of paddy cultivation were practiced in Ramnad; one was *seththukal* (wet land cultivation) and another *puluthikkal* (dry land cultivation). These two methods called *seththu ulavu* and *puluthi ulavu* were followed mostly in Ramnad and Paramakudi areas. The first system of cultivation was after filling the water then they plough and sowed. Another was after ploughing and sowing of the soil, they filled water in the field. Setupathies were appointed officers for supervising the harvesting the paddy, they were known as ‘Alavan’ and ‘Polithalli’.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 174-190; Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India*, 407.

<sup>43</sup> S.M. Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Varalaru*, (Ramanathapuram: Sharmila Publishers, 2003), 73.



## Irrigation Sources

During the pre-British period there were different water sources called *enthal*, *oorani*, *kulam*, *kuttai*, *kanmai*(tank) and *kundu*. For receiving river or tank water sources to agricultural land peasants created channels called *varaththukkal* and *vaikkal* and for removing excess water they formed passage called as *manukal*. Through the *vaikal* or channel the river or tank water used to irrigate. The *kanmais* gets water from the rivers and *enthal* used to gets water sources from local rains. The *kanmai* water passed through the *kalungu* (big size sluice) and *madai* (small size sluice) used for the irrigation. Land situated adjacent to the *kanmai* were known as *kulamkorvai*. The excess of water that flowed by the edge of *kanmai* was called '*thanpogi*'(automatic valve). The flow of the rain water was regulated to reach the *kanmai* through the *odai*. The main water sources for Ramnad were received from the major rivers of Vaigai and Gundar. The Vaigai was the main river for Ramnad country. It originated in the Varisanad of the Kandamanayakkanur hill of Madura and flows through Periyakulam, Madura, Thirupuvanam and Manamadurai taluks of Sivaganga estate and enters the Vendoni division of the Muthukulathur taluk and finally emptied in the Ramanathapuram tank. Gundar was rising in Gandamanaikkanur near Andipatti hills and this river is almost parallel to the Vaigai. Gundar entered the Ramnad zamindari through Vayyampatti in Pallimadam taluk and ending in the Kalari tank.<sup>44</sup>

The major tanks of Rajasingamangalam, Ramnad, Muthukulathur, Anaikulam, Sakkarai-kottai, Kalari, Saligramam, Sickal and Kilyur were the major water sources

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<sup>44</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 2; S.M. Kamal, *Setupathigal Sarithiram* (Chennai: Kavya Pathipagam, 2008), 637.

for Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>45</sup> Most of the tanks or *kanmai* were unfilled owing to the lack of monsoon and seasonable rains. Ramnad Zamindari used to get rainfall from the north-east monsoon received from October to December. The months of October and November were the rainiest months for this estate. The Zamindari got little benefit from south-west monsoon. The two popular winds occurred this estate. One was the south-west or south winds from the middle of July to October. Another was known as north-east between Novembers to February. The winds of the south-west Monsoon are called as ‘*Solagam*’ and north-east known as ‘*Kondul*’. The monsoons were not reliable for regular cultivation in the Ramnad Zamindari. The cultivation of the land depended upon the preservation of the water resources from these tanks and reservoirs.<sup>46</sup>

### **Kinds of Crops in Ramnad Zamindari**

The sugar-cane cultivation was commenced in February in *nanjai* lands. This cultivation was very limited and existed in the Kamudi, Pallimadam and Rajasingamangalam taluks of Ramnad Zamindari. The betel cultivation followed in the month of April or November, for this cultivation initially they sowed Aghatti (Agati grandiflora) seed in the land. In the betel creepers planted in between the gape of agatti trees. Usually varieties of plantain like *mondan*, *ladon*, *rastali* etc. were cultivated in *nanjai* lands. But *mondan* only was cultivated in the Ramnad Zamindari. Two kinds of *varagu* or *ragi*, *peru* and *kuru* were cultivated in this zamindari. Spiked millet, great millet, blackgram, dhal, pulses, horsegram, karamani, greens, cotton, cucumber and chilly were major crops cultivated. Sweet potato and onions were

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<sup>45</sup> According to *Board of Revenue*, the total number of tanks of Ramnad Zamindari was 64, *Board of Revenue*, No. 3198, dated 21.12.1882.

<sup>46</sup> Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India*, 403; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 23; Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 54, 313.

cultivated in some of the villages of this estate. The Ramnad estate is a dry zone, where one can find mostly Palmyra, Tamarind and Coconut trees.<sup>47</sup>

The southern Tamil country consisted of *palayams* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There were seventy-two *palayams* in southern Tamil country under the control of Nayaks of Madura. Among the seventy-two, fifty-one *palayams* belonged to Nayakan or Vadugan communities, eighteen belonged to Maravans and three were ruled by other groups. The total numbers of *palayams* were changing frequently based on the political nature of the *palayams*. Among these seventy-two *palayams* Ramnad the largest area and declared their independence due to the weakness of the Nayaks of Madura. These two *palayams* maintained their independence up to the intervention of Nawab which occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. The holder of the *palayam* was known as *palayakkarar* in Tamil, Poligar in English had maintained his power as Raja or chieftains over his territory, but they were not considered on par with a king or emperor.

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<sup>47</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 16,49.

## **Chapter 1**

# **Colonial Rule and Ramnad: From Little Kingdom to Zamindari**

### **Contents**

1. Political Negotiation of the Nawab of Carnatic with the Company
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  - 2.1. The Treaty of 1781
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3. The Company and the Ramnad Domain
4. Poligar Resistance against the Company Rule
5. The 1801 Revolt and its Impact in the Ramnad Kingdom
6. Ramnad and the Company Rule (1795 – 1803)
7. Ramnad: Little Kingdom to Zamindari
8. Administrative Structure of Ramnad Zamindari
  - 8.1. First Phase: 1803-1858
  - 8.2. Second Phase: 1858 - 1873
  - 8.3. Third Phase: 1873-1910
9. Land Revenue Administration in Ramnad Zamindari
10. Overview

The decline of the Vijayanagar Empire occurred after the Battle of Talikota (1565) in the second half of the sixteenth century and the weakness of central authority paved the way for the Madura Nayaks to become independent rulers. The death of Tirumalai Nayak (1659) led to political turmoil in the

Madura Kingdom in the second half of the seventeenth century. After him there was no powerful ruler to maintain peace, law and order in the Madura Kingdom and its tributary chieftains. Therefore frequent disputes emerged among the members of the royal family of Madura Nayaks. During the eighteenth century, war of succession between Bangaru Tirumalai Nayak<sup>1</sup> and Minakshi resulted in the collapse of the administration and further confusion of the political situation. Ultimately, after the suicide of Minakshi (1736) the Nayak Kingdom of Madura totally vanished.

### **1. Political Negotiation of the Nawab of Carnatic with the Company**

The royal disputes and the collapse of Madura Nayak Kingdom created the way for the entry of the Arcot Nawab into the Madura Kingdom which occurred in 1736 under Chanda Sahib, the Nawab of Carnatic (1736-1740).<sup>2</sup> The southern districts like Trichinopoly, Madura, and Tinnevely of Madras Presidency was under his control from 1736. After the death of Chanda Sahib, Muhamad Ali became the Nawab of Carnatic region in 1755 A.D. In 1765, Shah Alam of Delhi sultanate recognised Muhammed Ali as the Nawab of Carnatic and declared him as the sovereign power of Nawab with the title *Wallajah-Ameer-ul-Hind*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Minakshi was the wife of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak (1706-1732) and Bangaru Nayak was the lineage of Kumara Muthu, younger brother of Tirumalai Nayak; Sathyanatha Aiyer, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 232.

<sup>2</sup> *Some facts about Madura* (Chennai: Tamil Nadu Archives, 1909), 17.

<sup>3</sup> S.Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai* (Chennai: Pavai publication, 2009), 16-17.

In 1772 Carnatic Nawab Muhammad Ali captured Ramnad with the help of the Company. Nawab's policy of expansion made his kingdom spread over Tanjore, Ramnad and Sivaganga. After the consolidation of power, his main motive was to control the whole Carnatic region. As a result, Muhammad Ali maintained relationship with the French, the Dutch and the Danish to reduce the influence of the British. But, in 1775 Muhammad Ali's aspirations were checked due to the restoration of the Marathas in Tanjore and the outbreak of the second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84). The Court of Directors condemned the Marathas' conquest of Tanjore. These barriers were a turning point in the political turmoil of Carnatic region. The outbreak of rebellion in the Marava Kingdoms of Ramnad and Sivaganga also were the major reasons to restrain the power of the Nawab in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

The serious political turmoil during the second half of the eighteenth century changed the destiny of the southern Tamil country. During the fifth decade of the eighteenth century, the European powers of the English and the French entered the contest for political supremacy over the southern Tamil country (Carnatic wars). The French and the British tried to maintain their supremacy over India. Victory in the Battle of Plassey(1757) and the Battle of Buxar(1764) made the British power supreme in India. Hence they decided to widen their ascendancy in India. Therefore, they followed the divide-and-rule policy towards the local chieftains. In South India, the Company controlled

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<sup>4</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, (Trivandrum, 2005), 275-277.

Deccan and Carnatic regions by making the *Subhedar*<sup>5</sup> and the Nawab puppet rulers.

## 2. Treaties and Their Consequences in Ramnad Kingdom

### 2.1. The Treaty of 1781

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1781, the Nawab, Muhammad Ali made an agreement with the Company; accordingly, he transferred the revenue administration of Carnatic provinces to the Company for five years. One-sixth, as share, was sent to the Nawab for his personal expenses from the total revenue collection.<sup>6</sup> From 1781 onwards the Company began its intervention in the revenue administration of the southern Tamil country.<sup>7</sup> Following the advent of the Company's revenue administration over the Carnatic region, the Company appointed 'Receivers' of Assigned Revenues for collecting revenue.<sup>8</sup> In the same year Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72, and 1782-95)<sup>9</sup> was restored as ruler of Ramnad with the help of the Nawab. As a result of this support, the Nawab demanded Rs 1,75,000 from Muthuramalinga Setupathi I.<sup>10</sup> Initially Setupathi agreed to pay the Nawab,

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<sup>5</sup> *Subhedar* denote, Governor of a province, a Viceroy under the Mughal Government. He was native officers under the Company's army holding a rank equivalent to that of Captain under the European officers. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms* (London: WM .H. Allen and Co, 1855), 491.

<sup>6</sup> G. Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams* (New Delhi: Dominant Publishers, 2005), 46.

<sup>7</sup> Burton Stein used the term of 'southern Tamil country' which includes Madura, Ramnad, Pudukkottai, Sivaganga, Tinnevely and part of Travancore. Burton Stein, 'Circulation and Historical Geography of Tamil Country,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, No. 1 (1977): 7-26.

<sup>8</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, ( Government Press, Madras, 1972), 566.

<sup>9</sup> During the present research period in the name of Muthuramalinga Setupathi, there were three Setupathis ruled in Ramnad. Thus, researcher named as Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72 and 1782-95), Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-73) and Muthuramalinga Setupathi III (1910-28) for the proper understanding.

<sup>10</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 154.

but after he got ruling power, he made an alliance with the Sivaganga Kingdom. Both the Marava Kingdoms joined and together opposed the Nawab's supremacy. When they gave up their unity they lost their own strength.<sup>11</sup> After the death of Velu Nachiyar, Sivaganga was controlled by Vella Marudu and Chinna Marudu, shortly known as Marudu Brothers<sup>12</sup> who belonged to the Agambadians caste. As the Ramnad Setupathis belonged to the Maravan caste, it led to disunity between Sivaganga and Ramnad Kingdoms. Therefore, Muthuramalinga Setupathi I frequently fought with Sivaganga, instead of making alliance with them to deal with the British intervention. In 1784, the Company began its administration over the of the Nawab territories including Ramnad and Sivaganga. This arrangement made it possible for the Nawab and the Company to control the Marava kingdoms without any strong opposition.<sup>13</sup>

In 1785, the Nawab, Muhammad Ali again made a treaty with the Company; accordingly the Nawab handed over the revenue collection of the Madura Country for a short period to the Company. In 1786, the Company established the 'Board of Assigned Revenues'<sup>14</sup> for managing the revenue administration. In the meantime, Benjamim Torin was appointed Collector of

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<sup>11</sup> Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72 and 1782-95) wanted to marry Vellachi Nachiyar, daughter of Muthu Vaduganatha Tevar, she denied him and married Udaya Tevar. And Marudu Brothers belong to Agambadians were considered as below to Maravans, thus Ramnad Maravan ruler could accept them as equal among them. It was the reasons considered as the disunity among these Marava Kingdoms; S. Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas 1700 – 1802* (Madurai: Madurai Publishing House, 1977), 169,183.

<sup>12</sup> Two brothers (Vella and Chinna Marudu) served Military chief under Muthu Vaduganatha Tevar, ruler of Sivaganga Kingdom; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 167-169.

<sup>13</sup> *Military Consultations*, 24th January 1792, Vol.155, 39, Cited in Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 181.

<sup>14</sup> A. Ramasamy, mentioned the 'Board of Revenue' was formed in 1790. Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 6.



Tinnevelly and the dependent poligars.<sup>15</sup> A few years later, in 1787, the rest of the Nawab's territories came under the control of the Company. Charles Cornwallis, Governor General of Madras made a treaty with Muhammad Ali which cancelled the 1781 treaty and the Company got the right to collect the tribute from the entire Nawabi. After the collection, they paid one-fifth as share to the Nawab.<sup>16</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1787, Setupathi's *diwan* or *Pradani*<sup>17</sup> Sankara Narayana Pillai wrote a letter to Count Counday, the Governor General of French India, asking for support for independent status of Madura and Ramnad. Under the leadership of Bussy, the French force came to assist the Setupathis to make their domain independent from the Nawab and the Company. However, owing to the disturbance caused by the Mysore and Carnatic forces in the French territory, the French could not help the Setupathi. Muthuramlinga Setupathi's serious efforts, failed to achieve for Ramnad an independent status from the control of The Nawab and the Company. The Nawab deposed Muthuramalinga Setupathi I and took control of Ramnad. During the period of Nawab's supremacy he named Ramnad *Ali Nagar* and Sivaganga *Hussain Nagar*. The disunity among the Maravans of the domains of Ramnad and Sivaganga created way for the establishment of the authority of the Nawab and the Company.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevelly*, 78.

<sup>16</sup> *Report on Permanent Settlement of Dindigul and Madura*, Vol. 27. 2; Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 290-291.

<sup>17</sup> *Pradani* means a minister; Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 423.

<sup>18</sup> Kahirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 182-183

After the Company established the 'Board of Assigned Revenue' to administer the revenue, Alexander Macleod was appointed the supervisor of the revenue collection of the Madura Country; he was considered the first Collector of Ramnad. During the Nawab's reign in Ramnad, there were internal resistance to Nawab rule, by the followers of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I. Therefore, the Nawab decided to bring back Muthuramalinga Setupathi I to Ramnad as ruler and demanded him to pay a tribute of Rs 1,75,000. Muthuramalinga Setupathi I found that Muthirulappa Pillai was in favour of and loyal to the Company. As a result, Setupathi dismissed him and appointed Muthu Kumarappa Pillai as *Pradani* of Ramnad.<sup>19</sup> In March 1791, Macleod, Collector of Madura, temporarily increased Ramnad *peshcush*<sup>20</sup> from Rs 1,75,000 to Rs. 2,20,000.<sup>21</sup> In 1792 the Company restored the administration of the Nawab, since the little war with Mysore had ended.

## **2.2. Carnatic Treaty of 1792**

The treaty agreed between the Nawab Muhammad Ali and Charles Cornwallis was called Carnatic Treaty of 1792 which was more advantageous to the Company. According to this treaty, the Nawab gave military and financial control over his territory to the Company. Further, Ramnad Setupathi agreed to the control of the Company and he had to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 2,20,000 to

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<sup>19</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 96-97; J. H. Nelson, *The Madura Country A Manual*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> The *peshcush* means fixed land revenue paid by Poligars or Zamindars to the Company. *Glossary to the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 1813, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 96-97; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 243.

the Nawab.<sup>22</sup> According to this treaty the Poligars of the southern region were placed under the control of the Company. The Company had rights to collect tax from the Poligars (about one-fifth of the total produce). The Nawab lost his authority over the Poligars and the *Circar*<sup>23</sup> territory ultimately came under the control of the Company.<sup>24</sup> The Poligars and other subordinate revenue collectors came under the control of the Company. The treaty of 1792 enabled the Company collect *peshcush* from southern *palayams* like Tinnevely, Madura, Manapara, Ramnad and Sivaganga of southern Tamil country. In 1801 the remaining parts of the Carnatic, Palnaud, Nellore, Ongole, Arcot, Chittoor, district of Satovaid, Tinnevely and Madura were transferred to the Company.<sup>25</sup>

After the treaty of 1792, the Company established indirect control over Ramnad. After a few years, the Company deposed Muthuramalinga Setupathi I from the throne for his complicity with Kattaboma Nayakkan, poligar of Panjalankurichi, against the Company.<sup>26</sup> As a part of this treaty, on 12 July 1792, Benjamin Torin was appointed as the Collector of revenue from the poligars of Tinnevely, Madura, Trichinopoly, Ramnad and Sivaganga.<sup>27</sup> The fifth article of Carnatic treaty of 1792 gave rights to Torin to collect the regular tributes from the Poligars and estimated the tribute or *peshcush* around 264.70420:26 *star*

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<sup>22</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 272; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 242.

<sup>23</sup> The *Circar* means the Government

<sup>24</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 6; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 185-186; Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 281.

<sup>25</sup> P.K. Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement* (Madras: Government Press, Madras, 1940), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, 77.

*pagodas*.<sup>28</sup> The article sixth demanded the Poligars to pay village watch fee to the Nawab.<sup>29</sup> The agreement of 1792 was officially described “disgraceful to the character of the Company's government and destructive of the peace and prosperity of the country”.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. The Company and the Ramnad Domain

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1795, Muthuramalinga Setupathi I was deposed by the British for his ‘disobedience’ and ‘misrule’ thus creating internal disturbance in the Ramnad Kingdom.<sup>31</sup> Muthuramalinga Setupathi I was terminated from his throne and sent to the Trichinopoly prison and the Company made enquiry about the deposed Muthuramalinga Setupathi I through the former *Pradani* Muthirulappa Pillai. The Company found that he had two sisters Mangaleswari Nachiyar and ParvataVardhani Nachiyar and it decided to make Mangaleswari Nachiyar the ruler of Ramnad, as she had claimed it earlier. The Company had agreed orally to enthrone her, but it had taken eight years for implementation.<sup>32</sup> This decision was made by the Company for ending once for all the insurgence of Muthuramalinga Setupathi’s followers. The Company continued its control over Ramnad until it made Mangaleswari Nachiyar as the ruler on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1803 by Robert Clive, Governor of Madras. The internal disputes, domestic quarrel and civil war of Setupathis always weakened the Ramnad realm in the

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<sup>28</sup> *Pagoda* means the gold coin, a *pagoda* was equal to three rupees and a *star pagoda* was equal to three and a half rupees. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 387; M. Renganathan, *Zamindari System in the Madras Presidency 1802-1948* (Chennai: Siva Publications, 2010), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 185-87.

<sup>30</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, 271.

<sup>31</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series Madras II, The Southern and West Coast Districts, Native States and French Possessions* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1908), 235.

<sup>32</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, 96-97.

eighteenth century. After the imposition of the Company's power over Ramnad, the Setupathies were made into representatives of the Company in the Marava Kingdom. Finally the Company gained power over its political rival the Carnatic Nawab of the South. The internal circumstances and local opposition towards the British made the French enter this power contest. For some time, the French had controlled limited areas of the Carnatic region, but ultimately they lost control of these territories to the British.<sup>33</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1795, a treaty was signed between Nawab Wallajah Muhammad Ali and the Company. According to this agreement the entire Greater Marava Kingdom or Ramnad came under the direct control of Robert Hobart, Governor of Fort St. George for three years. In the same year, Hobart proposed to the Nawab for modifying the existing settlement and reorganization of the Poligari system.<sup>34</sup> After the expiry of three years, the amount of *peshcush* had to be paid to the Company by the Nawab of Arcot. The amount of *peshcush* might be not less than ten percent of the total revenue.<sup>35</sup> Based on the treaty of 1795 Ramnad came under the direct control of the Company management which appointed a Collector to administrate Ramnad on its behalf.<sup>36</sup> Ramnad was the first little kingdom<sup>37</sup> of southern Tamil country which came under the direct control of the Company management in 1801. The desire of the Company to

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<sup>33</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 261; S. Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupathis of Ramnad* (Karaikudi: Department of Extension Services Dr. Alagappa Chettiar Training College, 1959), p.57

<sup>34</sup> Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 246-247.

<sup>36</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 943.

<sup>37</sup> The *palayakarars* of southern Tamil country was termed as 'Little Kingdom' by Nicholas B Dirks. Nicholas B Dirks. 'The Pasts of a Palayakarar: the Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4, No. 4 (1982): 659.

establish their supremacy over the entire southern India led to local resistance against the Company.

#### **4. Poligar Resistance against the Company Rule**

During the tenure of Muhammad Ali, the Marava Rebellion led by Mappila Tevar<sup>38</sup> captured most of the *Circar* territory. The rebel raided over the camp of the English and the forts of Wallajahs. A rebellion broke out in Sivaganga under Vella Marudu and Chinna Marudu. The people of Sivaganga followed Marudu brothers and proclaimed Vellachi Nachiyar, the daughter of Velu Nachiar as the ruler of Sivaganga. Finally the Wallajahs failed to extend their power and dominance in the Marava countries in the last two decades of eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Ali, Nawab of Arcot ruled for six years but he failed to control the inhabitants (Maravans) of Ramnad Kingdom.

In 1797, the disaffection with the poligar of Panjalankurichi led to a rebellion in Ramnad. Kattaboma Nayakkan the poligar of Panjalankurichi was the first to join the insurgents against the Company's supremacy.<sup>40</sup> The Poligar's rising of 1798 took place in Tinnevely, Madura, Ramnad, Tanjore and some part of present Pudukkottai District.<sup>41</sup> Kattaboma disobeyed the authority of the Company and refused to pay the demanded *kist* or tribute. He plundered *Circar* territory and the territories of the pro-British poligars. Ramnad also faced such raids. Collector Jackson summoned Kattaboma to meet him at Courtallam

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<sup>38</sup> Follower of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I of Ramnad

<sup>39</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 275-277.

<sup>40</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupathis of Ramnad*, 61.

(Kuttralam) and pay the arrears of the Panjalankurichi palayam. After a number of avoidances Kattaboma met Jackson at Ramnad on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1798. At the end of the meeting the Collector tried to take Kattaboma into custody but he escaped.<sup>42</sup> At this moment several poligars refused to accept the British authority. Therefore in 1798 and 1801 there was great Poligars resistance in southern Tamil country.<sup>43</sup> The Company frequently interfered in the internal affairs of *palayams* on behalf of the Nawab of Arcot. Tinnevelly and the neighbouring states became the venue of constant warfare of poligars and the British.

The Company established direct administration over Tamil country through wars, alliances and diplomatic policies. In 1792 and 1799, the British ruled over Mysore and western parts of the Tamil country. In 1799 the British made a treaty with the Marathas making Tanjore one of their territories.<sup>44</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1799, under the head of Milapen<sup>45</sup> rose a revolt for restoration of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I to Ramnad throne. As a result of this revolt, the Company shifted Muthuramalinga Setupathi I from Trichinopoly to Madras prison and finally he passed away in Madras itself.<sup>46</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1799, the Court of Directors issued orders to all the feudatories to destroy their military forces and revised the agreements with *palayams*.<sup>47</sup> In 1799 the Tinnevelly League collapsed by the British and the Malabar League came to an agreement with the British when Veeravarman got some amount from the Company for withdrawing

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<sup>42</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 61

<sup>44</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 279.

<sup>45</sup> *shervagar* (bishop) of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I.

<sup>46</sup> Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 191-193.

<sup>47</sup> Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams*, 50.

his support to the League. Mysore came under the Company's control and Tipu Sultan was killed in the battle field itself in the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup> After the death of Muhammad Ali, his son Umdat-ul-Umara took over as the Nawab of Arcot. The Company accused him of maintaining secret correspondence alliance with Tipu Sultan; it was proved by certain papers at Srirangapatnam after the fall of fort during the fourth Mysore War in 1799. The letter was in Persian, it was translated into English by N.B. Edmonstone, the Company's Persian translator.<sup>49</sup>

After Jackson, Stephen Rumbold Lushington became the Collector of Tinnevely and Ramnad on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1799; he recommended to the government to make expeditions against the aggressive poligars. The Company forces lead by Major Bannerman with the support of Pudukkottai force captured Kattaboma and hanged him at Kaittar (Kayathar) in the presence of all other poligars.<sup>50</sup> After, the hanging of Kattaboma resistance spread over to Ramnad which opposed the authority of the Company. In 1801, Muthukaruppa Tevar of Mangudi rebelled against the Company in Ramnad.<sup>51</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1801 Kattaboma's armed supporters attacked Abiramam for releasing Kattaboma's brothers Kumaraswami Nayaka (dumb-boy or Oomaithurai) and Suppa Nayaka (Sivattaiya) from prison. At the end of the attack the *amildar* was wounded and sepoy (soldier) were disarmed. Similar attacks also took place in Muthukulathur and Kamudi taluks. Milapen, *shervagar*

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<sup>48</sup> Mangayarkarasi, *Marudhupandiyar: Varalarum Vazhimurayum*, 115.

<sup>49</sup> *Report on Permanent Settlement of Dindigul and Madurai*, Vol. 27. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> *Raja of Ramnad I*, p.38. Collected from Institute of French Library, Puducherry.



(bishop) of the former Setupathi, was leading the resistance and with his efforts, the number of rebellions increased. The poligar of Kadalgudi in support sent three hundred men to the rebel groups. The Company forces were sent to Madura and Panchalankurichi and attacked insurgents at Muthukulathur and this disaffection spread over to other taluks. The Company realised that the reason behind this riot was the deposition of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I. The Company decided to restore Setupathi to the Kingdom, acknowledging the hereditary rights of Mangaleswari Nachiyar. After the installation of the Zamindarini, the riots came to an end; and the Company management of Ramnad domain was transferred to the Zamindarini by the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1801, the death of Umdar-ul-Umara provided the opportunity to launch the Company's authority to collect the revenue of Carnatic. His eldest son Ali Husain refused to make any agreement with the Company; as a result, Edward Clive, Governor of Madras, diplomatically made a treaty with Azim ul Doulah, one of the heirs of Muhammad Ali's family. Accordingly, the Collector of Dindigul was appointed as the Collector of the entire Madura region.<sup>53</sup>

## **5. The 1801 Revolt and its Impact in the Ramnad Kingdom**

The rebellion of Panchalankurichi in 1799, which paved the way to the vital revolt of 1801 in Tinnevely, spread to Ramnad and Sivaganga. The Marudu brothers led the rebellion from the side of Sivaganga. According to S. Kadhivel

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<sup>52</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, 100.

<sup>53</sup> *Report on Permanent Settlement of Dindigul and Madurai*, Vol. 27, 2.

(1977) in the case Ramnad this revolt arose the main cause of the *kaval* issue.<sup>54</sup> After the treaty of Carnatic in 1792 the Company collected the *sthalam kaval* and *desa kaval* from the Nawab's territories. The Company's right of tax collection was who contested by the Marava *kaval* chiefs in the poligari territory and non-poligari territory. Therefore, rose against the Company administration.<sup>55</sup> The Marudu brothers of Sivaganga closely associated themselves with Gopala Nayak of Dindigul and Yadul Nayak of Anaimalai to form the South Indian Confederacy to oppose the Company. The league of poligars of Nagalapuram, Mannarkottai, Povali, Kollarpatti and Chennalgudi opted to follow the Marudu brother's league.<sup>56</sup>

During the South Indian Rebellion in May 1801, the Marudu brothers and their followers proclaimed Muthukaruppa Tevar as the ruler of Ramnad. Mailappan<sup>57</sup>, the chief of the Marava revolt, captured the southern and northern parts of the Ramnad. Ramnad and Sivaganga rebels joined under the leadership of Sevatha Thambi, son of Chinna Marudu. But he and his insurgents were subdued near Mangudi by Captain William Blackburn, a 'Resident' of Tanjore. In May 1801, the force of Captain Agnew subdued the Maravas' rebellions. The Maravans came under the control of the Company and Ramnad and Sivaganga rulers acted as nominees of the Company.<sup>58</sup> The British succeeded against these rebels and established their supremacy over the domains of Tanjore, Pudukkottai

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<sup>54</sup> The Company's action of the abolition of the *kaval* system was affected the political and economic domination of the Maravans of southern Tamil country.

<sup>55</sup> Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 192.

<sup>56</sup> *Instructions to John Bannerman, Secret Sundries*, Vol. 26, 389. Cited in Revathy, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Mailappan was one of the General of Setupathis of Ramnad

<sup>58</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 297-99; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 196-203.

and Ettayapuram. After the suppression of the rebellion, the 'Resident' of Dindigul, Ramnad and Madura ordered the poligars to disarm and destroy the forts. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1801, Robert Clive the Governor of Madras proclaimed to give amnesty to all the chieftains who were involved in rebellion and to abolish the system of *palayams*. The treaty of 1801 set of implement the Zamindari settlement and promised to respect the right to property, life, wages and customs of the inhabitants.<sup>59</sup>

The treaty of 1801 contained twelve articles: The first part ensured the proper establishment of Azim-ul-Doula in the state on behalf of the Company. The second article noted that the Company and the Nawab should strengthen the alliance. The third part spoke about the maintenance of the military for defending the Carnatic region. The fourth article stated that the Company had the full right to control the civil and military government of the Carnatic region. The Company had the ultimate power to appoint the officers for tax collection and administrate officers for civil and criminal jurisdiction. The fifth article fixed one-fifth of the total revenue of the Carnatic monthly to be the payment of 12,000 *star pagodas* for the maintenance and support of the Nawab and his family as pension. The sixth article gave details of the methods of deciding the fate of another one-fifth of the net revenues.

The seventh part fixed the Company as accountable to pay 6, 12,105 *star pagodas* a year from the total revenue of Carnatic to the Nawab. The eighth article fixed the Nawab's cavalry loan amount with its interest to 13, 24,342 *star*

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<sup>59</sup> *Military Consultations*, 20 October 1801, Vol. 288, 688. Cited in Revathy, 57-65.

*pagodas* as debt, after deducting the amount the Company had to pay to the Nawab. The ninth article demanded the Company to make suitable provision for the support of Umdut-ul-Umara. The tenth part required that, always the Nawab be treated with respect and honour connected with the functions of British government. For protecting him and his place, a suitable safeguard should be appointed from the Company troops. The eleventh article noted that British government only was responsible for the protection of the entire state of Carnatic against foreign intervention and for internal peace. But the armed men and forces should be maintained at the cost of the Nawab. The final article noted that the Nawab should give the legal order transferring his civil and military officials to the British government.<sup>60</sup>

The British government destroyed the forts of the poligars and prohibited them from reconstructing the forts and keeping military forces. The English forces made an efficient abolition of the Poligari system in the southern Tamil country.<sup>61</sup> The suppression of the poligar rebels and South Indian Rebels ended the powers of poligars in the southern Tamil country. The practice of the mixed government of the Nawab and the Company over southern India finally made the Company succeed in power and made the Company's power ultimate.

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<sup>60</sup> *Military Consultation, 1 December 1801*, Vol. 2899, 7669-70, Cited in Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams*, 67-68.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Kelly Firminger, *Affairs of the East India Company Being the Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1812*, Vol. III (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation 1812), 410.

## 6. Ramnad and the Company Rule (1795 – 1803)

The Company wanted to remove Muthuramalinga Setupathi I from power for his 'disobedience' of the government and the Nawab also had the same intention to remove him. For these reasons, the Madras Council decided to take military action against Ramnad country in 1795. Under the leadership of Major Stevenson, the Company forces entered Ramnad and captured the fort on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1795. Muthramalinga Setuapathi I was sent to prison in Trichinopoly. The Madras Council granted a pension of Rs 1000 a month to Muthuramalinga Setupathi I. After this action the Company had their direct rule in Ramnad. Prior to this the Setupathi's sister Mangaleswari Nachiyar had made claims for the Zamindarini of Ramnad. The Company accepted her claim in 1795 and took steps to make her Rani of Ramnad in 1803. The Nawab's heavy arrears made the Company to interfere in the politics of the Carnatic region. From 1800 onwards the Company had control over the entire Madras Presidency; but in 1801, the Company took Ramnad into their control.<sup>62</sup> Earlier Ramnad and Sivaganga were added with the Tinnevely District for administrative purpose from 1781 to 1803. Therefore, Ramnad was under the direct control of the British Collectors like Lawndan, Bowny, Jackson and Lushington.<sup>63</sup> During the period of S.R. Lushington, the Collector of Tinnevely, Parish was the Head assistant of the Ramnad affairs. In 1803 after the introduction of Permanent Settlement in Ramnad, the *Zillah* or district court was established at Ramnad. Parish was the

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<sup>62</sup> Pamela G Price, 'Warrior Caste 'Raja' and Gentleman 'Zamindar': One Person's Experience in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Modern Asian Studies* 17, No. 4 (1983): 564; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 172.

<sup>63</sup> S.M. Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Varalaru* (Ramanathapuram: Sharmila Publishers, 2003), 95.

first Collector of Ramnad *Zillah*, Madura and Dindigul. After the separation of Ramnad from the Tinnevelly, Cochrane was the first Collector of Tinnevelly from on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1803. The Board of Revenue mentions that ‘the Ramnad *Zillah* included the Zamindari of Sivaganga and Tinnevelly Zamindari and Districts of Dindigul and Madura. In 1808 the *Zillah* of Ramnad was abolished and the twenty nine little Zamindaries were denominated as the “Tinnevelly Pollams” which included the Tinnevelly district.’<sup>64</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Nawab’s control over the southern Tamil country came under of the Company. In this circumstance, Muthuramlinga Setupathi’s follower Milapen from Sithirankudi resisted the British rule in 1802. There was a political turmoil, which affected the British administration. Therefore Collector Lushington recommended to the Company to convert Ramnad to a Zamindari and to entrust the estate to a local. The British accepted the claim of Mangaleswari Nachiyar as the Zamindarini of Ramnad but the formal authorisation would be declared after eight years of this consideration. This diplomatic action stopped Milapen’s internal disturbances in Ramnad.<sup>65</sup> During the period between 1802 and 1805, a permanent settlement was introduced in the northern districts of Madras Presidency. After discussions and debate among the officials Read, Mundro and Macleod, a Permanent Settlement was introduced in the districts of Salem, Coimbatore, Madura, Malabar, Canara, Cuddapah, Bellary and Kurnool of the Madras Presidency. This settlement

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<sup>64</sup> R. Caldwell, *Political and General History of the District of Tinnevelly in the Presidency of Madras, from the earliest period to its cession to the English Government in A.D 1801* (Madras: Government Press, 1881), 231.

<sup>65</sup> Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 172; Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Varalaru*, 95; Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams*, 48-49.

produced better results in the northern districts, than in the southern districts of Madras Presidency due to the nature of soil and irrigation sources.<sup>66</sup>

## **7. Ramnad: Little Kingdom to Zamindari**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Company captured and controlled most of the little kingdoms in southern India and brought the poligars under control. Some parts of the southern Tamil country were ruled by local chieftains but they were the nominal rulers of the British government. They were Ramnad, Pudukkottai, Travancore and Mysore rulers.<sup>67</sup> After the suppression of the poligar's uprising in the southern Tamil country, The Company decided on the policy of Zamindari settlement in the erstwhile poligaris. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1801, the Government of Madras issued a proclamation to poligars of Tinnevely, Madura, Sivaganga and Dindigul to disarm and dismantled the military force. After this declaration a permanent revenue assessment was made with the loyal as well as subdued poligars on the basis of the Zamindari settlement of the Bengal Presidency. With the proclamation of the '*palayams*' conversion to Zamindari, the government fixed the *peshcush* permanently. Their armed personnel or peons were absorbed into government revenue service.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century* (New Delhi :Manohar Publishers,1992),78.

<sup>67</sup> K.K. Pillay, *Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum* (Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 2007), 483.

<sup>68</sup> Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 25-27.

The Government issued deeds or *Sunnud*<sup>69</sup> to Ramnad and Sivaganga. The *muchilikka*<sup>70</sup> or agreement of Rani Mangaleswari Nachiyar was made with the Company. On 29<sup>th</sup> April 1803 the Company recognised her as Zamindarini of Ramnad without political authority and she on her part agreed to pay annually a fixed amount of Rs. 3, 24,404-3-10 to the British government as *peshcush* or tribute. She ruled Zamindari region with the help of the *Pradani* Thiyagaraja Pillai, for four years. She was the first queen who agreed to the *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istimrar*.<sup>71</sup> Thus she was called *Istamrar Zamindarini* in remembrance of the settlement.<sup>72</sup> According to *Ramnad Manual*, *muchilikkas* no. 1 and 2 described about the details of *peshcush* the queen had to pay regularly. Accordingly she was responsible to pay an amount 13,541-26-6 *sterling pound*<sup>73</sup> for the year of 1801 A.D.<sup>74</sup> In 1803 the Government fixed the permanent settlement in Ramnad.<sup>75</sup> Two-thirds or half of the produce as *peshcush* was collected.

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<sup>69</sup> *Sunnud* means a grant or a charter or a patent: a document conveying to an individual emoluments, privileges or government rights to revenue from land. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 460.

<sup>70</sup> There were different spell used by scholars like H.H. Wilson *Muchchilika* and by B.H. Baden Powell (*Muchalka*). Here researcher used spell of *muchilikka* which mentions in primary records collected from Pondicherry Archives, Pondicherry. According to H.H. Wilson, *Muchalka* or *Moochulka* or *Muchchilika* means a written obligation or agreement commonly applied to a counterpart covenant on the part of the proprietors or cultivators of land, agreeing to the rates of assessment imposed by the government; also to an engagement under a penalty to observe the conditions of any deed or grant. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 348.

<sup>71</sup> *Istimrar* means holder of a perpetual farm or lease. *Milkiat-istimirar* means proprietary right or possession in perpetuity. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 221,341.

<sup>72</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 261; *Estates Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements Part III* (Madras: Government Press, 1938), 356-358.

<sup>73</sup> In 1815 there were seventy two varieties of gold coins and sixty kinds of silver coins and twenty five varieties of copper coins were followed in the Madras Presidency. In 1818 onwards the rupee currency came to practice. During the period of Sir Thomas Munro, the various kind of currency abolished and he introduces new currency system. Accordingly the earlier currency system was banned and the rupees system was introduced in the Madras Presidency. He fixed the old coin of single *varagan* to three and half rupees of current currency system. K.K. Pillay, *Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum*, 485.

<sup>74</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 254-256.

<sup>75</sup> According to J.H. Nelson, in 1802 Permanent Settlement was introduced in Ramnad; Nelson, *The Madura Country A Manual*, 155.



According to regulation XXV of 1802, the proprietary right of the soil was handed over to the Zamindar.<sup>76</sup> The Permanent Settlement was introduced in Chinglepet, Salem, Chittoor, Western and Southern poligars of Ramnad, Krishnakiri, Dindigul and some other areas of the Madras Presidency.<sup>77</sup> During the nineteenth century, Ramnad Zamindari's total area comprised around 2,000 square miles and 2,167 villages. The cultivable areas of the Ramnad Zamindari were 5,38,000 acres. Sivaganga Zamin consisted of 1,200 square miles and 2,058 total villages.<sup>78</sup> Bernard S Cohn noted that at the end of the nineteenth century, 804 Zamindars held 40 per cent of the land in Madras. The remaining 60 per cent was in Ryotwari tenure.<sup>79</sup>

The poligar's fire arms and other weapons were seized by the British.<sup>80</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Company established its sovereignty in the entire southern Tamil country. In 1802 *Sunnud*<sup>81</sup> were issued to 'poligars' who were redesignated 'Zamindars' and '*palayams*' were named 'Zamindaries' in the Madras Presidency. After the introduction of Zamindari settlement the 'Little Kingdom' status was reduced by 'Zamindari'.<sup>82</sup> The assessment of the

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<sup>76</sup> C.D. Maclean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency, Vol. I* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1987), 56; Firminger, *Affairs of the East India Company Being the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 393. For more details about the *Reports of Permanent Settlement in the Southern Pollams*, see Appendix No. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, 79.

<sup>78</sup> Pamela G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>79</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'Recruitment of Elite in India Under British Rule', in *Essays in Comparative Social Stratification*, ed. Leonard Plotnicov and Arthur Tuden (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 132.

<sup>80</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, 103.

<sup>81</sup> *Sunnud* means a prop or support, a patent, charter or written authority for holding either land or office. *Milkiat- Istamrar* means property rights in continuation. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 28,44. For more elaborate details about *Sunnud* see Appendix No.6.

<sup>82</sup> Kahirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 193, 203.

land tax was fixed and collected as two-third or half share from the total produce. In the Madras Presidency the amount of the tax was fixed from one-third to two-thirds.<sup>83</sup> According to this *sunnuds* the poligars' rights of collecting tax and his status was reduced and forts were destroyed. The *Maravans* were forbidden to keep artillery with them.<sup>84</sup>

Those who converted to this Zamindari tenure were each given the title of *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istimrar* which recognised the authority of Zamindarship. Those who agreed to Zamindarship were called 'settled *palayams*' or Zamindars. The Madras Presidency had western *palayams* (Chittoor, North Arcot and South Arcot) and southern *palayam* (Ramnad, Madura and Tinnevely).<sup>85</sup> After the conversion of poligars into Zamindars, the armed peons were taken for revenue services.<sup>86</sup> Zamindars leased their lands to private owners or landlords, gave *muchilikka*<sup>87</sup> or agreement documents called *qabuliyat* or acceptance which was the legal tie-up of landholders or tenants and Zamindars.<sup>88</sup> Letter, dated 5th April 1803, a *Special Commission* submitted proposal to the government regarding fixing the permanent land assessments in the southern Zamindaries. Based on this proposal, the government fixed the Zamindari assessment at the rate of two-thirds of the total produce. This *Special Commission* fixed the permanent assessment of Sivaganga at fifty percent; in case of Tinnevely *palayam* they fixed land

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<sup>83</sup> B.H. Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, Vol III (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1892), 23; Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 309; S.M. Kamal, *Setupathigal Sarithiram* (Chennai: Kavya Pathipagam, 2008), 92-95.

<sup>84</sup> Kadirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 203.

<sup>85</sup> Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, 17.

<sup>86</sup> R. Kuppan, *British Ascendancy in Tamil Nadu* (Chennai: Fire pen Publication, 2008), 90.

<sup>87</sup> *Muchilikkas* a document called as *kubuliyat* or acceptance which was the legal tie-up of ryots and Zamindars. For original document of *muchilikka* see Appendix No. 7.

<sup>88</sup> Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, Vol I (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1892), 511.

assessment fifty four to fifty seven percent for large *palayams* and *forty one* to *forty nine* percent for small *palayams*. On 22 April 1803, the Madras Government approved the *Special Commission* recommendation and ordered ‘*Sunnad* to be given to a Zamindar to approve him as the holder of the Zamindari tenure.<sup>89</sup> From 1803 onwards the Ramnad Kingdom was redesignated and converted to Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>90</sup>

## **8. Administrative Structure of Ramnad Zamindari**

### **8.1. First Phase: 1803-1858**

After the suppression of South Indian rebellion of 1801 and the Vellore Rebellion of 1806 the Company regained its control over the southern territory and later the Company’s control spread over neighbouring areas. When The Company established its sway over the Tamil region. It found a variety of land revenue system prevailing in different parts of the region. They followed scheme of revenue was inconvenient for getting proper revenue from agriculture. The Company initially thought reorganising of the administrative setup of these territories.<sup>91</sup> After the permanent or Zamindari settlement was introduced over Ramnad, the Company appointed Collectors to control the Zamindari. The Zamindars were the revenue collectors of their allotted areas or estates. The Zamindars or Setupthis of Ramnad were demanded to pay an annual tribute or *peshcush* to the Company. They could make any decision unrelated to political and military affairs.

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<sup>89</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 56-57.

<sup>90</sup> Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 191-193; Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 46-47.

<sup>91</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamil Nadu: A Real History*, 308.

This new land revenue policy of the British made great changes in southern Tamil country. A new administrative structure was introduced towards agricultural and village settlements. The Company appointed a Collector in each district for administrative convenience. The princely state of Tanjore and other territories were assisted by Council of advisors, called *sirkeel* in Tanjore, *diwan* in Ramnad, *karyakarta* in Pudukkottai and *Pradani* in Panchalamkurichi. For his assistance representatives were appointed. They were known as *vakeel*, *tahsildar*, *taluqdar*, *killedar* and *subhedar* and stationed at the Court of the respective Zamindari. In the administrative setup, *kannakkapillai*(Accountants), *sibbendies* (Revenue peons), *daroghas* (Superintendents), *gomastas* (Clerks) and *mahatadi peons* (messengers) played a major role.<sup>92</sup> Each district was divided into *taluks* and *pirkana*. Taluks were supervised by *tahshildars*.<sup>93</sup> At the village level *munsif* and *karnam* were appointed mostly from dominate castes of the village and their main duty was collecting tax from the rural areas. Every year they conducted the *jamabanthi* or auditing. In that meeting, the village officers verified the revenue accounts under the supervision of the district Collector.<sup>94</sup> This kind of land and administrative systems of the Company was followed from the Muslim rulers.

During the period of Vijayaragunatha Setupathi (1711-25) revenue administration of Ramnad was maintained properly. He brought Vellalans as accountants from Madura country to Ramnad to maintain the accounts of revenue administration. Further he divided his country into eight revenue divisions for

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<sup>92</sup> *Revenue Consultations*, 14.12.1788, Vol. 91, 4445-4450. Cited in Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams*, 79.

<sup>93</sup> Pillay, *Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum*, 483.

<sup>94</sup> A. Ramasamy, *Tamilnattu Varalaru* (Chennai: New Century Book House, 2009), 298.

easier administration. Again owing to continuous warfare, the military was divided into seventy two military divisions and had appointed chieftains for each division. This administration setup was maintained for more than sixty years. During the reign of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1782-1795), *Pradani* Muthirulappa Pillai, divided Ramnad into ninety-six *mahanam* or revenue divisions and appointed *maniyakar* (mostly belonging to Maravan caste) to each *mahanam*, the *maniyakar* had assistants like *sambirithi* and *thandalkar*. During the collection of tax *sambirithi* used to maintain the accounts and *thandalkar* performed as peon or *kavalkar* in *maniyakar* divisions. The local servants belonged to socially and economically dominant castes. For further administrative function these ninety-six divisions<sup>95</sup> were formed into seventeen taluks. These taluks were managed by *Amins* who had assistant staff and officers to support him.<sup>96</sup> For a short period, after the introduction of Zamindari settlement in Ramnad in 1803, the government decided to make revenue *tahsils*. Under Ramnad estate there were five revenue *tahsils*: Ramnad, Tiruvadanaï, Paramakudi, Tiruchuli and Muthukulathur with a total area of 2,104 square miles.<sup>97</sup> The government frequently divided and modified the Ramnad estate for their convenient rule. But it is not clearly shown in other archival records. Quite a lot of records and sources indicate that initially Ramnad Zamindari had seventeen taluks and later it was grouped into three divisions. Again it became six taluks for convenient administration.

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<sup>95</sup> There were no records to find the list of 96 revenue divisions, after this revenue division was formed into 17. There was list of 17 taluks found in the *Ramnad Manual*.

<sup>96</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 335-337.

<sup>97</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series Madras II, The Southern and West Coast Districts, Native States and French Possessions* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1908), 234.

Before 1858, Ramnad Zamindari had been classified into seventeen taluks and it had head quarters in the each taluk. The country was divided into seventeen taluks for the purpose of revenue administration by *Pradani* Muthirulappa Pillai.<sup>98</sup> The seventeen taluks were as follows:

Sl. No.	Taluks	Head Quarter Stations
1.	Ramnad	Ramnad
2.	Kelakadu	Pirappanvalasai
3.	Sickal	Sickal
4.	Muthukulathur	Muthukulathur
5.	Pappankulam	Sayalkudi
6.	Kamudi	Kamudi
7.	Abiramam	Abiramam
8.	Vendoni	Paramakudi
9.	Kamankottai	Kamankottai
10.	Saligramam	Saligramam
11.	Rajasingamangalam	Rajasingamangalam
12.	Arunuthimangalam	Kelapanayur
13.	Hanumanthakudi	Kannangudi
14.	Kuthagainadu	Eravuseri
15.	Orur	Kattivayal
16.	Kottaipatinam	Kottaipatinam
17.	Pallimadum	Tiruchuli

Source: Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 9.

## 8.2. Second Phase: 1858 – 1873

Ramnad Zamindari contained 2,162 villages and 574 hamlets.<sup>99</sup> In 1858, after India was brought under the rule of the British Crown, Ponnusami Tevar<sup>100</sup> took over the ministership of Ramnad. He converted the seventeen taluks and

<sup>98</sup> During Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72 and 1782-1795) reign he was *diwan* or *Pradani* in his rule. Setupathi got information of his illegal actions against him, thus he dismissed him.

<sup>99</sup> Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India*, Madras, 392.

<sup>100</sup> Manager of Rani Parvata Vardani Nachiyar (1846-62) who was the ruler of Ramnad Zamindari

grouped them into three divisions or *Vattagai*, Northern division, Central division and Southern division.

SL. No.	Divisions	Comprising Taluks
1	South division or <i>Therku vattagai</i>	1.Sickal, 2. Muthukulathur 3.Pappankulam,4. Kamudi 5.Abiramam 6.Vendony 7. Pallimadam
2	North division or <i>Vatakku vattagai</i>	1.Kamankottai 2.Saligramam 3.Rajasingamangalam, 4.Arunuthimangalam, 5.Hanumanthakudi, 6.Kuthagainadu, 7.Oroor 8.Kottaipattanam
3	Central division	1.Ramnad 2.Kilakkadu

Source: Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 9, 337.

Ponnusami Tevar had grouped the taluks into these three divisions without altering them territory wise.

### 8.3. Third Phase: 1873-1910

In 1873, the Ramnad Zamindari came under Court of Wards, when Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-73) was a minor. These seventeen taluks were regrouped into six taluks as follows:

Sl. No.	Name of the Taluks	Comprised portion of the early taluks
1	Ramnad	Ramnad, Keelakadu, some portion of Kamankottai and Rajasingamangalam
2.	Muthukulathur	Sickal, Vendoni, portion of Muthukulathur, Abiramamum and Kamankottai
3.	Kamudi	Pappankulam, some Portion of Muthukulathur, Kamudi and Abiramam
4.	Pallimadam	Pallimadam and portion of Kamudi and Abiramamum
5.	Rajasingamangalam	Saligramum and portion of Kamankottai, Rajasingamangalam , Arunuthimangalam
6.	Hanumanthakudi	Hanumanthakudy, Kuthagainadu , Orur, Kottaipatinam and portion of Arunuthimangalam.

Source: Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*,337.

Each taluk was managed by a *tahsildar* with peons for his assistance. They were accountable to estate manager. All these taluks had fifty eight revenue divisions which were supervised by revenue inspectors.<sup>101</sup> These taluk divisions were maintained till the formation on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1910 of Ramnad District,<sup>102</sup> which included some part of Madura and Tinnevelly districts.<sup>103</sup>

## 9. Land Revenue Administration in Ramnad Zamindari

During the eighteenth century, agricultural land was divided into two groups, *palayam* lands and *circar* lands. The *palayam* land was controlled and managed by poligars. In case of *circar* or government lands, the term was used by the Nayaks and the Nawab to mean the land under their control. The Company appointed *renters* to collect revenue or *peshcush* from these lands, instead of the government. These territories were called as *circar* territory.<sup>104</sup> Several land tenures were followed in the Madras Presidency in the sphere of land revenue administration. It was not uniform in all the provinces, but was a practice based on the conditions of the soil.<sup>105</sup> Under the control of the Company, land revenue was the main source of income. The Company followed different kinds of land tenure and methods of tax collection in the entire Madras Presidency. The earlier

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<sup>101</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 337.

<sup>102</sup> In 1910 Ramnad district contains nine taluks, such as Ramnad, Muthukulathur, Paramakudi, Tiruvadanaï, Tirupathur, Sivaganga, Aruppukottai, Sattur and Srivilliputhur. In 1985 Ramnad district was bifurcated into three major districts like Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Tevar district, Kamarajar district and Ramanathapuram (Ramnad) district. In 1996 by government order the personality name was wiped and renamed all districts named by it's headquarter. Likewise these districts named as Sivaganga district, Virudhunagar and Ramanathapuram district.

<sup>103</sup> *Board of Revenue*, No. 3198, dated 21.12.1882, 12; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> S. Manikandan, *Contest for Power and Legitimacy: Little kingdoms of Southern Tamil Country during the Eighteenth Century* unpublished Ph.D thesis, Submitted to Pondicherry University, 2013. 34.

<sup>105</sup> A. Goodrich., 'Land Revenue in Madras,' *The Economic Journal* 1, No. 3 (1891): 449.



system of land tax collection was modified and changed. The Company introduced new taxes to increase revenue. The Company practised revenue settlement based on the nature and conditions of the soil. After the British annexed most parts of southern India by the beginning of the nineteenth century, they introduced three kinds of land revenue settlement in the Madras Presidency, such as Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari systems. The Permanent Settlement or *Zamindari* system was first introduced in Bengal, by Lord Cornwallis in 1793. This system was engaged with landlords and it was introduced in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Central province and later in parts of the Madras region. The Ryotwari system was imposed on with cultivators, which came into practice in the second decade of the nineteenth century. This settlement was first adopted in the Baramahal District under Colonel Read. After him, it was extended to other parts of the Madras Presidency by Colonel Munro (Governor of Madras 1820-27) and Collectors like Captain Macleod, Graham and Hurdis who served under him. These Collectors practised it in their territories of Dindigul, Coimbatore, Provinces of Canara and Ceded Districts. Ryotwari settlement was adopted in almost all areas of Madras, Bombay and Assam. In the 1830's the Mahalwari system (village based) was followed in all villages of Punjab.<sup>106</sup> For the purpose of land administration each province was divided into districts. The numbers of the districts varied from time to time. In 1829, there were sixty six districts in the Bengal Presidency, twenty districts in Madras Presidency and eleven districts in

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<sup>106</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 23; Shilpi Kapur and Sukkoo Kim, *British Colonial Institution and Economic Development in India* (Washington: Washington University, 2007), 4.

Bombay Presidency.<sup>107</sup> In the Madras Presidency the government stabilised peace and order after the end of the Poligari system. They wanted to get more and regular income from the land revenue of the Madras Presidency. Thus they planned to introduce a permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency which was followed in the Bengal Presidency.

## 10. Overview

Frequent warfare and weakness of forces led to the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire as a central authority in the second half of the sixteenth century. The political weakness of the central power prompted representatives to declare independent authority in their respective territories. The Madura Nayaks, one of the tributary rulers of Vijayanagara Empire, declared themselves independent after the fall of Vijayanagara rulers in the Battle of Talikota in 1565. Madura Nayakdom initiated by the Visvanatha Nayak in 1529, declined after the death of Tirumalai Nayak (1659), as there was no talented ruler to control entire Madura. The weakness of Madura Nayaks and internal disturbances and policy towards the tributary domains led to the downfall of Madura Nayak in the first half of the eighteenth century.

After the death of Aurangzeb (1707) and the fall of Mughal Empire in northern India the Mughal representatives declared their independence. Chanda Sahib, one of the representatives of Delhi Sultan, declared himself an autonomous ruler of the Carnatic provinces. The internal disputes and

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<sup>107</sup> J. Kumar, *Company India A Comprehensive History of India (1757-1858)* (Patna: Janak Prakashan, 1980), 186.

disturbances of the Madura Kingdom turned Chanda Sahib's attention towards the Madura Kingdom in 1736. The weak administration of the Nawab and his financial debt made Chanda Shaib form inevitable tie-up with the French in Pondicherry and finally lose his territory to his rival Muhammad Ali Wallajah and the Company. The Wallajah Nawab and the Company's agreements of 1781 and 1792 played major roles in the Company's control being established in the Carnatic region. The status and power of Ramnad Setupathis turned the Company's attention towards the Marava rulers. The Maravans' and the southern poligars opposed the Company's and the Nawab's supremacy. Therefore the Nawab and the Company made alliance and tried to suppress the Setupathi of Ramnad. Ultimately in 1795 the Company captured and occupied Ramnad and made its settlement there. The transformation of the Company from being on commercial body into a political, diplomatic group and bureaucratic power in southern India occurred in the beginning of the nineteenth century (1801). After its entry into and establishment of power in Ramnad, the Company began their activities to get more and regular land revenue from Ramnad. Therefore, the Company tried a permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency based on the model of the Bengal Presidency. In 1802, the permanent or Zamindari land tenure was introduced in the District of Chingleput; and the rest of the districts followed afterwards, leading to far reaching consequences which are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Zamindari Tenure and Land Settlement in Ramnad Zamindari

#### Contents

1. Terminological explanation of Zamindar
2. Power and Authority of Zamindars
3. Permanent Settlement in Bengal Presidency
4. Debate over the Introduction of the Zamindari System in the Madras Presidency
5. Permanent Settlement in Madras Presidency
6. Duties and responsibilities of Zamindars
7. Zamindari Settlement and Hierarchical Structure in Ramnad Zamindari
8. Zamindari Tenure and Ramnad Zamindari
  - 8.1 *Kattukuthagai* or Lease System 1739-1800
  - 8.2 *Amani* System 1793-1799
  - 8.3 Triennial Village Lease System 1808-1810
  - 8.4 Decennial Lease System 1811
  - 8.5 *Olungu* System 1821
  - 8.6 *Mottafaisal* System 1859-1860
9. Land, Weight and Currency Measurement
10. Zamindars Measures and Methods of Tax Collection
11. Land Revenue in Ramnad from 1787-1888
12. Impact of Zamindari system on Peasants
13. Overview

The Persian term ‘*zamindar*’ means ‘holder of land’.<sup>1</sup> The Zamindari system became predominant during the medieval period in India. During the seventeenth century the term ‘Zamindar’ replaced local terms indicating the same or similar kind of land right which had been followed in India like ‘*khoti*’ and ‘*maqqaddam*’ in Doab Satarabi in north India, ‘*biswi*’ in Awadh, ‘*bhomi*’ tenure in Rajasthan, ‘*bhant*’ or ‘*vanth*’ land tenure in Gujarat. ‘Zamin’ in Persian language means land. “The suffix ‘dar’ implied control or attachment, but not necessarily ownership.”<sup>2</sup> Irfan Habib in his work ‘*Agrarian System of Mughal India*’ argues that the ‘persons other than the king laid claim to a right upon land that in name was ownership’. He held the view that the Mughal’s *jagirdar* status was equal to European landlords, whose lands were easily transferable when the king needed them. Therefore Europeans came to conclude that there was no private property in India during medieval period.<sup>3</sup> The French traveller, Francois Bernier discusses land ownership in his work *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D. 1656-1668*. His view is that ‘the proprietor of every acre of land in the kingdom’ had ‘no idea of the principle of *meum* and *tuum*, relatively to land or other real possessions...’.<sup>4</sup> James Mill’s *History of British India* points out: “The property of the soil resided in the sovereign; for if it does not reside in him, it will be impossible to show to whom it belongs.” He concludes that the ‘ruler must be the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 502

<sup>2</sup> Ainslie T. Embree, ‘Landholding in India and British Institutions,’ in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Agricultural System of Mughal India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D. 1656-1668* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).

owner of the land; there is no possibility to show to whom that property belongs to'.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee The word *chowdary*, *crorie* and *Zamindar* were synonyms.<sup>6</sup> Baden Powell states, 'The Muslim ruler adopted the local rajah or local chieftain as Zamindar of their state and considered them 'proprietor' of the entire waste and cultivated land of his region'.<sup>7</sup> After the Company took over the administration, they messed up land administration. Its intension was to collect more money rapidly within a short period. Danial Thorner noted that "Company needs money to extend and strengthen its rule in the Country".<sup>8</sup> Historians believe that land settlement of the colonial government in India was followed by the Muslim rulers' administration policy. But land ownership in the Company rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries differed from Muslim rule.<sup>9</sup> Initially the Company started their trial-and-error method in the land revenue policy in Bengal during the eighteenth century. The Company tried to understand the Indian customs and land patterns to collect regular revenue. It followed the Mughal pattern in the field of administration like *tahsildar*, *talukdar* etc. Robert Eric Frykenberg and Nilamani Mukherjee emphasise local influences on formulation of revenue policies.

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<sup>5</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, 265.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I (Madras: Government Press, 1938), 4.

<sup>7</sup> B.H. Baden Powell, *The Land System of British India*, Vol. III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 133.

<sup>8</sup> G. Kaushal, *Economic History of India 1757-1966* (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1979), 96-97

<sup>9</sup> Ainslie, 'Landholding in India and British Institutions,' 49.

Ranajit Guha and Eric Stokes stress the philosophical approach in land revenue policies of British.<sup>10</sup>

Company rule was founded in India, in the second half of the eighteenth century. Initially, the British did not bring about major changes in the land revenue administration. But in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a vital transformation happened in the land revenue policy of the British, especially in southern India. Land revenue was their vital source of income after they entered administration. They experimented with several kinds of land revenue policies. Their revenue policy was not the same in all the provinces, where the practice was based on the nature and condition of the soil. As a result, they introduced three important revenue settlements in India, such as Zamindari or permanent settlement, Ryotwari and Mahalwari system. Ryotwari system was made with cultivators and Mahalwari settlement was made with groups of villages. The Ryotwari settlement was engaged in almost all areas of Madras, Bombay and Assam. The Mahalwari system was followed in all villages of Punjab.<sup>11</sup> The Zamindari system was engaged with landlords or chieftains. The Zamindari system was introduced in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Central Province and part of the Madras region. Zamindari denoted landed gentry; and they were called 'local bosses'. During the nineteenth century they played an intermediary role between ryots and governments in collecting land revenue and maintaining law and order in their allotted territories. They had close relationship and direct contact with the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Eric Frykenberg and Nilamani Mukherjee's *The Ryotwari System and Social Organisation in the Madras Presidency*(Calcutta: 1962); Ranajit Guha's *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (New Delhi:1982), Eric Stokes's *The English Utilitarian and India*(London:1959).

<sup>11</sup> Shilpi Kapur and Sukkoo Kim, *British Colonial Institution and Economic Development in India*, 4; Goodrich, "Land Revenue in Madras," 449.

ryots. In the Madras Presidency, the Company decided to use the dependant poligars to collect land revenue from cultivators and decided to put an end to their defence force and ordered them to maintain the Company force.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Power and Authority of Zamindars**

The Zamindar was considered the owner of the land, who could sell, mortgage or transfer the land if he desired. He had hereditary right over the land. If he failed to pay tax the government could take away the land from his ownership of rights.<sup>13</sup> The Zamindar's main duty was holding of the land and collecting revenue from the peasant and he was demanded to pay a fixed tribute to the Company.<sup>14</sup> The rate of the payment of tax or *peshcush* was fixed in the case of zamindars, but it was not fixed in the case of ryots. Zamindars collected land tax accordingly to their interests from the ryots.<sup>15</sup> The Zamindar had to pay a fixed amount to the government which was called *peshcush*. Usually revenue was collected at 66.6 % of the total produce. The total amount of the tax was fixed and mentioned in the *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istamrar*.<sup>16</sup> The government fixed the ownership of the land until they paid the fixed *peshcush* regularly.<sup>17</sup> The assessment of the land tax was permanent and tax was fixed and collected as *two-*

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<sup>12</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I (Madras: Government Press, 1938), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, 84-86.

<sup>14</sup> Arokiaswami and Royappa, *The Modern Economic History of India*, 102-103; Renganathan, *Zamindari System in the Madras Presidency 1802-1948*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Bala Parameswari, "Abolition of Zamindari System and its Impact on Agriculture," 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> S. Sundaraja Iyengar, *Land Tenures in the Madras Presidency* (Madras: The Modern Printing Works, 1916), 125, 126

<sup>17</sup> Sarveswaran, "Zamindars, the Feudal lords of Tamilnad," 63-64.



*third*<sup>18</sup> from the total produce.<sup>19</sup> S. Baliga points out that the Zamindar kept one portion of the total produce from peasant and the rest of the share was to be paid to the government. The government approved of the proposal and ordered the Board to make a settlement with zamindars, “whom it is our intention to constitute proprietors of their respective estates or zamindaris.... also to prepare information on the rights of the *talukdars* and under-tenantry.... In the havelly lands in which the property is vested immediately in the Company we have instructed the Board to form small sub-divisions of estates and to transfer the proprietary rights of all such lands to native landholders”.<sup>20</sup> The Zamindar should issue *pattas* to his ryots and fix the rate of his share. The ryot can seek redress against the violence of zamindars’ illegal actions towards them. The Zamindar and ryots had an agreement on this system which was known as *muchilikkas*.<sup>21</sup> In the Zamindari areas the revenue administration was under the control of the Zamindar. The Government lent some civilian help to Zamindars for maintaining peace and supporting the collection of tax, but the expense of the maintenance was the responsibility of Zamindars. The British were the ultimate controller of the Zamindars.<sup>22</sup> The lake and canal irrigated territories came under Zamindari tenure. Each Zamindar had almost a thousand acres of land. He was the

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<sup>18</sup> According to Romesh Dutt, the collection of the total produce was *nine-tenth* under the permanent settlement. Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (London: Trubner & Co, 1906), 87; According to regulation I of 1793 the permanent settlement act was passed in Bengal and *ninety percent* of total produce was fixed as tax. Cited in G. Kaushal, *Economic History of India 1757-1966*, 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the affairs of the East India Company*, Vol II, 1866, 562.

<sup>20</sup> *Revenue Consultations*, dated 4th September 1799 (*Board’s Consultations* Nos. 13-14, dated 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1799 in Board’s Vol 233, 7471-7473). Cited in B.S. Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration*, Vol. II, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Bala Parameswari, “Abolition of Zamindari System and its Impact on Agriculture,” 10-12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ramanathapuram District 1910-1963* (Chennai: Tamil Nadu Archives Library, 1963), 2.

responsible person to maintain and improves irrigation sources in his allotted locale. Zamindars collected tree tax, waste land grass tax, cattle consumption grass tax etc.<sup>23</sup> According to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, Zamindari settlement was made permanent and revenue was imposed on Zamindars who owned the estate. This settlement was practised without any proper survey or records. He had to collect revenue from certain limits of his Zamindari and the amount payable to the state was fixed permanently and was unalterable.<sup>24</sup> In the case of waste land controlled by Zamindars, ryots should not cultivate such lands without getting permission from the Zamindar or his agent.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Permanent Settlement in Bengal Presidency

The Nawab of Bengal granted *diwani* rights (collection of land revenue) to the Company from 1765 A.D. Through these rights the Company gained privileges to collect tax from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In the beginning, the Company did not understand the nature of soil and people of India, this circumstance led to confusion in managing the agrarian economy and the society for a few years. In 1772, Warren Hastings, who was the Governor General of Bengal, introduced a new system called *farming system* or *pannai system*. This system failed to get more revenue for the Company. In 1784, the Board of Directors of the Company appointed Charles Cornwallis, Governor General of

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<sup>23</sup> G. Veeraiyan, *Tamilnadu Vivasayikal Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru* (Chennai: Tamilnadu Vivasayikal Sangam, 1998), 5-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India* Introduction to Vol. III, Evidence taken in the Madras Presidency, Bombay, 1928, 12-13

<sup>25</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 277.

India for regulating the revenue administration. Cornwallis observed that the earlier system of land revenue gave small earnings to the Company.<sup>26</sup>

Until 1790 the Company government followed the annual revenue settlement based on the nature of the soil. Later, they decided to get regular revenue; therefore, they wanted to make changes in the land revenue administration. During the control of the Company, it faced issues of land ownership and collecting revenue from the land. Two senior servants of the Company, Charles Grant and John Shore presented two different ideas to implement land revenue administration. Shore's view was that 'the property or ownership of the land was in the hands of Zamindars, who was responsible to pay fixed revenue to the Government'. But Grant's opinion was that 'the Government had the whole land proprietorship with uncountable rights and made settlement with anyone, Zamindar or Peasant'. The England Government accepted the views of Shore and ordered Cornwallis to make settlement with zamindars as far as possible. Initially this settlement was made for ten years. Following the settlement, Cornwallis appointed Shore as the President of Board of Revenue. Cornwallis decided to make the settlement permanently, instead of testing for ten years. This view of Cornwallis was fully opposed by Grant and Shore. After a long discussion and discourse on the land revenue policy, Cornwallis announced on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1790 the ten years land revenue

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<sup>26</sup> Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, 82-83.

settlement which would be made permanent after getting approval from Court of Directors.<sup>27</sup>

The Court of Directors' letter on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1792, which reviewed the arrangements, made way for the permanent settlement in Bengal. There was a different view about the land rights of Zamindars under the Mughals, whether they had rights of property or the Collectors of revenue. Whatever the land rights of Zamindars on lands under the Mughals, the Court of Directors initiated permanent zamindari settlement to establish the 'real, permanent, valuable landed rights over Bengal province and to confer "right upon the zamindars". On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1793 Court of Directors approved of it and the decennial settlement was converted to permanent settlement. Following this approval, the Governor General in council declared that "to the Zamindars, independent talookdars and other actual proprietors of land with or on behalf of whom a settlement has been concluded..... that at the expiration of the term of the settlement, no alteration will be made in the assessment which they have respectively engaged to pay, but that they and their heirs and lawful successors will be allowed to hold their estates at such assessment forever".<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, the Government made the Zamindars owners of land and demanded and ordered them to pay a fixed amount as annual revenue to the Government. This settlement created the loyal land holders in the state.<sup>29</sup> Cornwallis's codification of regulations in 1793 contains forty three regulations.

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<sup>27</sup> Majumdar, *Advanced History of India*, 791-794.

<sup>28</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 8,11.

<sup>29</sup> Majumdar, *Advanced History of India*, 791-794.

Among the guidelines regulation VIII of 1793 formulated and made the decennial settlement in Bengal. Cornwallis and Philip Francis at the outset introduced the permanent settlement system in Bengal in 1793. Initially this arrangement was made as a temporary arrangement, later it was practised on a permanent basis by the Company. The Company had issues in administrating Bengal through well-known administrative officials. They utilised zamindars to collect revenue from peasants.<sup>30</sup> Lord Cornwallis and Francis believed that Zamindari system was a suitable one to promote agricultural production and get permanent income or revenue to the Government. The main motive of this system was to maintain twofold strength of economic and political power.<sup>31</sup> Shore believed that cultivators had rights on the land with fixed rent on it and Zamindar had right on the whole estate forever and fixed the land tribute. But the idea was that the initial permanent settlement was the fixed rate to be settled by the landholder with the state. But in the case of the cultivator the sum of fixed rate was paid to Zamindar which amount was fixed by Zamindars or landholders within the limitation of the Company orders.<sup>32</sup> The letters of Court of Directors ordered to make permanent settlement made in every suitable instance with the zamindars with the exception of in case of incapacity, old age, lunacy, contumacy or notorious profligacy of character.<sup>33</sup> Shore initiated the system of permanent settlement; Lord Cornwallis established his concept of economic policy towards Bengal.

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<sup>30</sup> Shilpi Kapur and Sukkoo Kim, *British Colonial Institution and Economic Development in India*, 11; Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, 82-83; Arokiaswami and Royappa, *The Modern Economic History of India*, 102-103

<sup>31</sup> Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 15-17.

<sup>33</sup> *Letters of Court of Directors to Supreme Government of Bengal* dated on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1786.

#### **4. Debate over the Introduction of the Zamindari System in the Madras Presidency**

There was a great discussion on fixing the land revenue assessment policies in Madras Presidency. The *Circuit Committee*<sup>34</sup> was appointed to investigate the condition of northern *circars* and *jagirs* of Madras Presidency to introduce the permanent settlement. In 1786 this Committee recommended to the Government of Madras, that for implementing the permanent settlement more equipment and more information were needed for assessing the soil condition of the Madras Presidency. Moreover, the military force of the Zamindars was not controlled by the Mughals or Nizam. The *Circuit Committee* recommended to the Company to bide for some time to implement the permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency. In the 1790s in Bengal, Cornwallis tried his decennial settlement to assess the land revenue. In 1792 he introduced the permanent settlement in the Bengal Presidency before the completion of decennial settlement expired. He found the system of permanent to be successful in Bengal with the suggestion of the Board of Directors and advised Cornwallis to extend the system to other parts of India especially to Madras Presidency. But in the case of Madras, Collector and Board of Revenue members opposed the permanent settlement and argued that it was not suitable to Madras Presidency.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Circuit committee* was appointed during 1775-76 worked until 1778 and after five years of inactivity again worked from 1783-1788; P.T. George, 'Land System and Legislation in Madras,' *Artha Vijanna* 12, No. 1 & 2 (1970): 27.

<sup>35</sup> B.R. Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency* (Madras: P.R. Rama Iyar & Co, 1927), 34-36.

After the implementation of Permanent settlement in Bengal Presidency in 1793, the Court of Directors wanted to extend this system to the Madras Presidency. Northern Circar of Madras Presidency was the initial target for introducing the permanent settlement. On 21st April 1795, the Court of Directors intimated their intention of introducing the Bengal revenue system within the territories of Fort St. George and authorized the disbandment of the military followers of the Zamindars in the Northern Circars. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1795, Madras Government replied to the Court of Directors that “so much remained to be acquired in knowledge and reformed in practice that they should use great caution in introducing the Bengal Regulations”.<sup>36</sup>

The Court of Directors was keenly interested to introduce the permanent settlement in Madras Presidency. But the resistance and power of the poligars were main challenges faced by the Company in the Madras Presidency. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1802 a *Special Commission*<sup>37</sup> was appointed to make settlement.<sup>38</sup> This Special Commission consisted of William Petrie (Member of Council) Cockburn (Member of the Board of Revenue), and J. Webbe who had acquired experience of the Bengal Revenue settlement. Hodgson (Secretary to Government, Revenue Department) was appointed as Secretary to the Special Commission.<sup>39</sup> William Bentinck, the Governor of Madras (1803-1807), was supported by Munro in introducing the Ryotwari settlement in the Madras

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<sup>36</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> For more details about the *Report of Special Commission on Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevelly Pollams* see Appendix No. 1

<sup>38</sup> George, ‘Land System and Legislation in Madras,’ 27-28.

<sup>39</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 37.

Presidency. Thackeray<sup>40</sup> visited the Madras Presidency and reported against the Zamindari system. But John Hodgson<sup>41</sup> supported the introduction of the Zamindari system in the Madras Presidency.<sup>42</sup>

The permanent settlement regulations prepared by the Special Commission and submitted to the Madras Government on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1802 for its approval. Regulation XXV of 1802, Regulation XXVIII of 1802, Regulation XXIX of 1802 and Regulation XXX of 1802 were the important permanent settlement regulation made by the Special Commission. These regulations of the permanent settlement were important for establishing the principles of the zamindari system and fixing the duties and liabilities of the cultivators and landholders. The Regulation XXV of 1802 was “for declaring the proprietary right of lands to be vested in certain individual persons and for defining the rights of such persons under a permanent assessment of the land revenue in the British territories subject to the Presidency of Fort St. George”. Regulation XXVIII of 1802 was “for empowering landholders and farmers of land to distrain and sell the personal property of under-farmer and ryots and in certain cases the personal property of their sureties for arrear of rent or revenue and for preventing landholders and farmers of land from confining or inflicting corporal punishment on their under-farmer and ryot or their sureties in the British Territories subject to the Presidency of Fort St. George”. According to Regulation XXIX of 1802, was “for establishing the Office of Karnams and defining the duties of the land said

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<sup>40</sup> Member of the Board of Revenue.

<sup>41</sup> John Hodgson was the member of Board of Revenue, who appointed in 1807 A.D

<sup>42</sup> B.H. Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, Vol. III, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 23.



Office in the British territories subject in the Presidency of Fort St. George. According to Regulation XXX of 1802, “A Regulation prescribing pottahs to be used between landholders and their under-farmers, tenants and ryots in the British Territories subject to the Presidency of Fort St. George.”<sup>43</sup> According to the *Special Committee* and after a long discussion and argument, the permanent settlement was introduced in the Madras Presidency.

## **5. Permanent Settlement in Madras Presidency**

The Company divided Madras Presidency into twenty one districts for the convenience of administration such as Ganjam, Vizagapatnam, Godavari, Kistna, Nellore, Anantapore, Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Kurnool, Bellary, Cuddapah, Salem, Coimbatore, Nilgris, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura, Tinnevely, South Canara and Malabar. After the formation of the new district, the Company started their process of reorganisation of administration.<sup>44</sup> E. C. Greenway, Collector of Chingleput, played an active part in the introduction of the Permanent settlement in Chingleput Jaghir. He submitted an elaborate report on subject of the implementation of the Permanent settlement in the Chingleput to the Board of Revenue on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1802. Greenway divided Chingleput Jaghir into sixty one zamindaris and each zamindari containing several villages.<sup>45</sup> Initially the Zamindari settlement was first practised in Chinglepet District (1802) and then extended to Salem, southern and central districts of Madras Presidency.

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<sup>43</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 37-38.

<sup>44</sup> Renganathan, *Zamindari System in the Madras Presidency 1802-1948*, 13

<sup>45</sup> *Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the affairs of the East India Company*, Vol I, 217.

On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1802, S.R. Lushington, Collector of Tinnevelly<sup>46</sup> submitted a report<sup>47</sup> on the introduction of the permanent settlement to the Special Commission. The Company agreed Mangaleswari Nachiyar as successor to the zamindari of Ramnad and planned to grant the permanent property right of zamindari of Ramnad to her.<sup>48</sup> Lushington proposed a permanent assessment at two-thirds of the average gross revenue receipts during the six *faslis* of 1795, 1796, 1797, 1799, 1800 and 1801 exclusive of Salt, Customs, etc. Accordingly, the permanent assessment of the Ramnad was fixed at the sum of star pagodas 94,733.<sup>49</sup> After the suppression of the south Indian rebellion and the death of Marudu brothers which occurred in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Edward Clive, Governor of Madras, appointed Padmathur Wodaya Tevar as Zamindar of Sivaganga on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1801 and placed him under the tenure of Zamindari. Based on the recommendation of Lushington, the permanent assessment of the Sivaganga was fixed at the annual sum of star pagodas 75,000.<sup>50</sup>

In 1803 the *Special Commission* introduced the permanent settlement in Baramahal district, four divisions of Masulipatnam and two divisions of Vizagapatnam, the eastern *palayams* of Venkatagiri, Kalahasti, Bommarajapollam and Sydapore. In the southern *palayams* of Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevelly the permanent settlement was introduced in 1803. The

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<sup>46</sup> List of Collectors of Tinnevelly and Ramnad see Appendix No. 3

<sup>47</sup> For more details of S.R. Lushington *Report on Permanent Settlement* see Appendix No.3

<sup>48</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Report of the Special Commission on Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevelly (Southern Pollams)* dated on 5th April 1803, para 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Report of the Special Commission on Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevelly (Southern Pollams)* dated on 5th April 1803, para 18,19

Board of Revenue introduced the permanent system in the northern *circars*<sup>51</sup> except the Ceded districts, Malabar, South Kanara and Nilgiris where the Company was not necessitated to alter the old system of land tenure.<sup>52</sup> Most of the *palayams* of the Madras Presidency had come under this system by 1804.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Duties and responsibilities of Zamindars

The ownership right of the Zamindars originated during the Mughal period as they claimed hereditary rights to a direct share in the produce from the lands under their control. The different terms were used in different parts of India to denote land control. The peasant groups were differently known as 'muzari', 'asami', or 'raya'. In northern India a big zamindar who was engaged on behalf of smaller zamindars to pay revenue to the government was called a 'talukdar'. But in Bengal the term 'talukdar' denoted a person of lower status than Zamindar.<sup>54</sup> In south India also talukdars were of lower status than zamindars who were responsible for paying revenue to the government.

According to regulation VIII of 1793 zamindars and *talukdars* were the proprietors of the land. They had the hereditary right over the land.<sup>55</sup> Shore's report says that, under the permanent settlement the Zamindar had the rights of property in the soil and ryot had the occupancy right or rights of possession on

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<sup>51</sup> B.S. Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration*, Vols. II (Madras: Government of Madras, 1960), 84; Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Zacharias, *Madras Agriculture*, 126.

<sup>53</sup> Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, 24; George, 'Land System and Legislation in Madras,' 27-28.

<sup>54</sup> Rekha Bandyopadhyay, 'Land System in India: A Historical Review,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no.52 (December 1993): A150.

<sup>55</sup> Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, 400.

soil. But the ryot does not have the right to mortgage or sell the land.<sup>56</sup> According to Permanent system, Zamindar was declared as proprietor of the all land includes waste and arable land within his limitation. The *havally* land was subdivided into *mutta* land which comprise several villages. These villages sold out to who asks for highest bid. The rate of the land tax was fixed by with reference of average collection of past years. Two third of the total produce was fixed as share of the government. Zamindars were restricted in their demand on ryots regarding the rate or share of produce. They were ordered to issue *pattas* to their ryots to fix the rates of customary rents. In case of zamindars' infringement of *pattas* of ryots or in case of any other illegal action made by Zamindars, the ryot had the right to appeal in the civil court which was established in each district.<sup>57</sup> In case of waste land controlled by Zamindars, ryot should not cultivate such land without getting permission from Zamindar or his agent.<sup>58</sup> The Report of the Board of Revenue on waste land states:

“The *tarasu* or waste land, is subdivided into the *anadi karambu* or immemorial waste and the *seikal karambu* or waste land that has sometime been cultivated; each of these consists chiefly of tracts of common on which the *mirasidars* graze the cattle employed by them in agriculture, or of jungle, in which they cut the fire-wood used by them for fuel and both are held free from tax. should the mirasidars, however, possess the means, though it is understood that the consent of government is necessary before they can break up the plough; but the

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<sup>56</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration*, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 277.

moment any part of either *seikar* or *anadi karambu* is reclaimed, the nature of the land is changed, it ceased to be *tarasu* or waste, and no sooner is it converted into cultivated land than it is transferred as such, in the village accounts, to the head of varapet or tirvepet, and in common with all land of that description becomes..... liable to tax.”<sup>59</sup>

Zamindar was the controller of his allotted territory, maintained law and order, solved the issues of ryots and furnished advance to peasants to cultivate land and collected tax from them due to the government. In this capacity he enjoyed a high social status, prestige and influence over the territory under his control and ownership of rent free land termed *saverum*.<sup>60</sup> He received the customary right on share of crops by getting ready cash termed as *rasum*.<sup>61</sup>

## **7. Zamindari Settlement and Hierarchical Structure in Ramnad Zamindari**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the entire southern Tamil country had come under the direct control of the British and rebel poligars were suppressed and pro-British poligars were reduced in status as Zamindars. The Company decided that assigned Zamindars were to be the revenue Collectors and demanded to be paid certain amount as *peshcush* or tribute. Zamindars were the revenue collectors of the Company and they had no rights to fix the land tax or rent without getting proper intimation from the government. Zamindars were the

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<sup>59</sup> *Minute of Board of Revenue*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1818.

<sup>60</sup> According to glossary of fifth report, *saverum* means an allotment of land, or of the government's revenue thereof held by Zamindars and other principal revenue officers, rent free as part of the emolument of their offices; a term used in the peninsula answering to nancar in the Bengal provinces. *Glossary to the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 1813, 41.

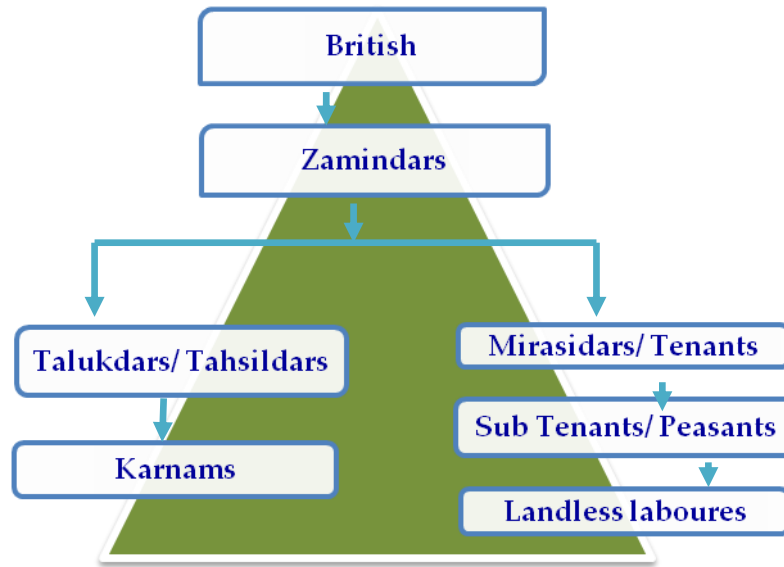
<sup>61</sup> Gnanasundara Mudaliyar, *Notes on the Permanent Settlement*, 19.

responsible persons to allotted areas and they had to maintain law and order apart from the collecting of land revenue. They maintained good relationship with the Company Government. As a consequence, Zamindars left the administrations to the Company and followed a luxurious way of life. Personal litigation cases and increasing debts made them neglect the administration of estates and people's welfare leading to maladministration by their ministers and officials.<sup>62</sup>

Zamindars' political power was reduced and made them mediators between peasants and the Company. Zamindars divided their territories and distributed them to mirasidars or tenants and made agreements with them for certain percentage or *melvaram* or government share from the tenant. These tenants were mostly economically wealthy community people like Vellalans, Maravans, Nayakkans and Reddies. Peasants or landless labourers were like Pallans, Paraiyans and others were under the control of mirasidars. The mirasidars were the landholders or landowners who had the social domination and powers in the social structure. The following chart shows the landholding and social hierarchy of the Ramnad estate.

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<sup>62</sup> Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 154.



The above chart indicates the political, economic and social hierarchy of colonial Ramnad. In this case the Zamindars of Ramnad belonged to Maravan community, who constituted the royal or Setupathi family. The Zamindars distributed their areas to other communities like Vellalans, Reddies, Nayakkans to cultivate the land and collected certain portion from them as rent for the lands. These landlords cultivated the land by using the landless labours or *pannayal* and *padiyal* who were mostly Pallans and Paraiyans. They were given a little amount of the total produce of the crops and allowed to stay in separate areas respectively known as *pallacheri* and *paraicheri*.

The Zamindar socially and economically had a strong position and he was keenly interested to maintain the status or *mariyathai*, for in such capacity he granted lands to temples, celebrated festivals, royal functions, marriage ceremonies and rituals. After the introduction of the Zamindari tenure in the Ramnad region, the political power of the Setupathis was reduced as Zamindars or mediators between the government and ryots. In this sense, Dirks argues that

Zamindars were 'nominal rulers' of the Company's government and his view was that the 'powerless king' could be called the 'hollow crown', who had no decision making power over the neighbouring states. But Pamela Price denies the concept of 'hollow crown' and she gives a strong argument about the Zamindars' social and economic powers, status and honour or *mariyathai* in their territorial divisions. She argues that Ramnad Zamindars continued their honour and status in the colonial rule too. The present study accepts the views of Dirks, for the reason that Ramnad Zamindars were revenue collectors to government, and had no political supremacy over the allotted territories. Zamindars had maintained their power in their areas through military force before the settlement of Zamindari tenure. But after the settlement they could not stabilise their political power; instead they were concentrating on notions of life-style to strengthen their social power through the collection of land revenue from allotted regions.

The Zamindars, Government officers and landholders were regulated and supervised by regulation acts of 1802, 1822. In 1865 the rent recovery act provided the power to district Collectors to resolve the disputes between landholders and ryots regarding land assessment. The Madras Estate Act I of 1908 repealed the rent recovery act of 1865. Section 6 of this act protected the occupancy right of the ryot over the soil. The government legalised the protection of cultivators but the intension behind this act was to get more land revenue from the cultivators. A different kind of revenue collection was followed whenever the Company needed to change the revenue collection and to get a more regular income.



## 8. Zamindari Tenure and Ramnad Zamindari

### 8.1. *Kattukuthagai*<sup>63</sup> or Lease System 1739-1800

During the eighteenth century *kuthagai* or lease system was practised. Under this system lands were leased for some period where land held at a permanent fixed money-rent which usually light. This system was mostly practised in the dry areas because dry land was quite away from the landlord's place.<sup>64</sup> Under *Kattukuthagai* the government gave part of land for cultivation to individual cultivators and land tax was collected based on the produce. It was followed from 1739 to 1800, but it was not followed continuously and the produce was shared by chieftains and cultivators. During 1760-1763 this was changed due to the management of Muhammad Yusuf Khan, Governor of Madura as he collected tax as money by the current price rate of the produce.<sup>65</sup> Prior to the nineteenth century the Ramnad Zamindari land had been divided into two categories, *nanjai* and *punjai* for purpose of revenue collection. In the first half of the nineteenth century *Pradani* Muthirulappa Pillai decided to sub-divide these *nanjai* and *punjai* lands into six types based on the nature and condition of the land such as *nanjai proper*, *nanjai vanpayir*, *nanjaitaram punjai*, *punjai proper*, *punjai vanpayir* and *kulamkorvai*.<sup>66</sup> *Nanjai* land paid rent in kind based on the value of the total produce. *Nanjai vanpayir* land paid money on specific assessment of each product. *Punjai vanpayir* paid money like the ordinary *punjai*

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<sup>63</sup> According to *Tamil Lexicon*, spelled in *Kattu-k-kuttakai* which means a long-term lease of land; fixed rent; rent collected in a lump sum. *Tamil Lexicon*, Vol II, part I, 651-652.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 270; Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 277.

<sup>66</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 290.

assessment except when the cultivation was done on *nanjai* land other than those set apart for *nanjai* cultivation, in which case rent was paid based on specific assessment of the products. *nanjaitaram punjai*, *punjai* and *kulamkorvai* paid a fixed rate of money.<sup>67</sup>

## 8.2. Amani System 1793-1799

*Amani* was the payment tax for the *nanjai* land produce. *Amani* system was followed from 1793 to 1799 and the produce was divided between the government and cultivators. The government appointed agents to supervise the sharing system who were called *sibbendy peons*. They were always there in the village or land with the duty of supervising the cultivation and measuring the government share of produce. The *pisanam* and *kar* crops were the two main paddy crops under this system. *Pisanam* crops began in February or March and *kar* crops started in May or June. The Government's share of the *pisanam* crop collected initially in kind, later it changed into money payment, but in case of *kar* crops share was in kind. The Company officials used to calculate approximately the total produce of the land. In case of *pisanam* crop this evaluation process starts in February or March and fixing the tax most probably in the month of May or June. The *kar* crops cultivation used to start in the month of May or June. The Company officials used to encourage the progress of cultivation to get more revenue from the land. The government share of the *pisanam* crops cultivation was *three-fifths* of the total produce. The harvest of the crops was under the

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<sup>67</sup> *Nanjai* lands mostly produce Paddy. *Nanjai vanpayir* crops were Betel, Vine, Sugarcane, Plantain, *Punjai vanpayir* land products were Chillies, Brinjal, Tobacco, Saffron, Sweet Potato. *Kolamkorvai* land tax on produce of Paddy cultivation made in the bed of tanks. *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 118.

control of officials until the produce sold. At the end of June this crops were sold out and the officials collected some amount from ryots as *kist*. The government share was kept under preservation; later it was sold out with heavy profit.<sup>68</sup>

Initially the British followed two methods to collect revenue such as through Zamindars and directly by the Company's renters. After the introduction of the Permanent settlement the Government appointed Zamindars as revenue collectors and renters and their responsibility was to accumulate the revenue from the villages. Initially there was no limitation of land tax by the Company; gradually the Zamindars increased the land tax year by year without considering the ryot's conditions and without consulting government. At first the Company was not interested to control the Zamindar or *mittadar* with regard to collection of tax from the tenants or cultivators. Later when revenue was reduced from the Zamindars, the Company decided to interfere in the method of collecting tax. There was need to regulate the Zamindars and their officers related with land revenue collection. S.R. Lushington took charge as Collector of Ramnad and Tinnevely in August 1801. During his period, a Special Commission was appointed in 1801 to supervise the permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency. The Zamindari Regulation of XXV was passed in 1802 and based on this regulation Zamindari system was practised in Madras Presidency during 1802 and 1807. In 1802, J. Webbe was appointed Special Commissioner to precede the permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency. He was the head of the drafting of the regulation of permanent settlement with the assistance of John

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<sup>68</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 71; Ramasamy, *TamilNadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 568.

Hodgson and E.C. Greenway.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly with the Regulation of XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXX and XXXI, permanent regulation of 1802 was passed on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1802 for regulating the Zamindar's land revenue collection. In the same year the *patta* and *karnam* regulation also was made to regulate officers and official records for the protection of ryots.<sup>70</sup> In pursuance of the permanent legislation of 1802 the estate or Zamindari was called *mitta* or *muttas*.<sup>71</sup> After the downfall of the poligars, pro-British poligars were redesignated as Zamindars. Mangaleswari Nachiyar<sup>72</sup> was accepted as Ramnad Zamindarini orally in 1795 and recognised since 1803.<sup>73</sup> Under the Special Commission report,<sup>74</sup> the government adopted permanent settlement in Ramnad and made an agreement called *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istamrar*<sup>75</sup> to Rani based on regulation XXV of 1802 which considered as deed of agreement to the Company's supremacy.<sup>76</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> February 1803, S.R. Lushington, sent a letter to his assistant Parish, ordering him to set Rani Mangaleswari Natchiar as Ramnad Zamindarini. Accordingly on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1803 she agreed to pay *peshcush* Rs 3,24,404-3-10<sup>77</sup> to the Company. Formally On 21<sup>st</sup> February 1803 the Company introduced Zamindari settlement in the Ramnad. Rani Mangaleswari Nachiyar who was the sister of Muthuramalinga Setupathi, was the first Zamindarini of

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<sup>69</sup> Srinivasa Ragavaiyengar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 228.

<sup>70</sup> George, 'Land System and Legislation in Madras,' 27-28.

<sup>71</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 61.

<sup>72</sup> For lineage of Ramnad Zamindari see Appendix No. 5

<sup>73</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 253-254.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix No.2 for more details

<sup>75</sup> *Sunnud* means a prop or support, a patent, charter or written authority for holding either land or office. *Milkiat- Istamrar* means property rights in continuation. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 28,44 For more elaborate details about *Sunnud* see Appendix No.6.

<sup>76</sup> Nelson, Chapter III. 160

<sup>77</sup> According to *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, stated *peshcush* was fixed Rs 3,31,565-8-0 on 22 April 1803. *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, part II, 111.

Ramnad. Mangaleswari Nachiyar continued her rule for four years with her minister Thiagaraja Pillai.<sup>78</sup> She was the first queen who agreed to *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istamrar*, so she was called *Istamrar Zamindarini* for remembrance of the settlement. In return Zamindar had given *muchilikkas*<sup>79</sup> or an agreement document to the Government for the zamindari tenure. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1803 Parishes stated that

“I proceeded to Ramnad for the purpose of placing the Rane Mangaleswari Natchiar in full possession of the Ramnad Zamindary upon the terms stipulated in your report to the special commission upon the subject”. Further he noted that “The distinguished propriety which has marked the conduct of the Rane during a period of eight years arising entirely from a superior understanding to most persons, in a similar situation, made it no difficult task to impress on her mind, the important advantages which would result to herself and to the people of her Zamindary from the arrangement established for the administration of justice of the Public Revenue on permanent foundations. In order that she might fully comprehend the benefit, which the execution of this system would confer on her, I explained the principles of the new arrangements in the fullest manner, by stating that her country would be secured to her under a Sunnud beyond the power of any person to take any part of it from her. The assessment she was to pay was fixed for ever and that however extensive might be the fruits of her own good management and industry, no increase would be demanded from her or from her children. To this effect the company’s faith

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<sup>78</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 261; Badan Powell, *The Land System of British India*, 511.

<sup>79</sup> *Muchilikkas* a document called as *kubuliyat* or acceptance which was the legal tie-up of ryots and Zamindars. For original document of *muchilikka* see Appendix No. 6

would be pledged in the most public and solemn manner and that she might be acquainted with the condition which would be required from her in return for those inestimable blessings, I caused the deed of permanent property to be distinctly and deliberately read to her, stopping occasionally in the most important parts, to be satisfied that she did not mistake its meaning”.<sup>80</sup>

With the introduction of the Zamindari tenure in Ramnad, dynamic changes occurred in the political, social and economic history of Ramnad. Politically the rulers of Ramnad (Setupathis) or chief of *palayakarars* were converted to Zamindars and the powers of *palayakarars* were reduced. After the conversion to zamindari tenure, the Ramnad kingdom had reduced powers.<sup>81</sup> In the first decade of nineteenth century there were different opinions about the expansion of the zamindari settlement in the entire Madras Presidency. Colonel Read and Sir Thomas Munro were eager to introduce the Ryotwari settlement in the Madras Presidency. During the period of William Bentinck (1803-06) agreed with Munro to forbid the enlargement of the permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency. After the prohibition of the expansion of the permanent settlement, the government decided to introduce temporary land revenue system in the Madras Presidency.<sup>82</sup> S.R. Lushington roughly divided the land into four classes as *karisal*, *veppal*, *pottal* and *sevval*. The rate of these assessments varied based on the condition of the soil. In 1805, Lushington visited the villages and based on the lands he approximately fixed the land tax. He extended on advance of money

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<sup>80</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 254-261

<sup>81</sup> After 1803, Ramnad Kingdom named as Ramnad Zamindari or Estate or *Samasthanam*, which means the Company politically, established their supremacy over the territory, it was under their supreme control.

<sup>82</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 50.

for *pisanam* cultivation.<sup>83</sup> As the revenue from the *amani* system was not satisfactory to the Company government, the Company planned to change the pattern of revenue system.

### **8.3. Triennial Village Lease System 1808-1809**

William Bentinck proposed a new land revenue system of village lease to the Board of Revenue. The Board agreed to Bentinck's ideas and imposed them in the districts of Tinnevely, Madura, Coimbatore, South and North Arcots in 1804. Under this system the government gave land to village community or head of the village community as lease to cultivate. The rate of the tax was fixed permanently with the average collection of the previous year; collecting tax from this land was called *shist*.<sup>84</sup> In 1807 John Hodgson joined as member of the Board of Revenue, he made a strong recommendation to the Board in favour of the village lease system to continue. This lease system made agreement with ryots for three to five years. In case of ryots declining to cultivate, *mittadars* might be brought into the rented villages either singly or in groups. Therefore, the government accepted his report and implemented it in the triennial village lease system. It was practised during the period of 1808-1809 based on Hodgson's recommendation. Accordingly, land tax was collected as *one-fourth* of the total produce. Initially, the rate of the tax was changed every year; later the government decided to extend the village lease system to ten years. The Company did not get proper revenue from the villages on triennial lease and

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<sup>83</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 573.

<sup>84</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu A Real History*, 311; *shist* means remainder, balance of standard rent, after deduction. *Glossary to the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 1813, 43

decided to withdraw the three years lease system and planned to get more revenue from the land permanently. Thus, the Company initiated the ten-year lease system and implemented it in 1811. As a result, the *amani* system gradually vanished after the introduction of the decennial lease.<sup>85</sup>

#### **8.4. Decennial Lease System 1811**

The Company decided to extend the village lease system to ten years. In April 1809 finally the rate of lease was fixed; but the government did not gain more profit. As a result, they decided to withdraw the triennial village lease and implemented the decennial village rent system in 1811. The Company management decided to fix permanent rent rate for the villages for ten years. In 1817 several acres of land came under cultivation; therefore, paddy production increased. However, the ryots struggled to sell their produce; the *karnams* and *mittadars* bought the produce for low rates from ryots and in turn, sold for much profit. The Collector's reports mention the abuse by *karnams* and *mittadars*.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, for regulating the land revenue administration, the Company introduced the *olungu* system.

#### **8.5. Olungu System 1821**

The Company government decided that lease systems were not fit for getting regular income in the Ramnad Zamindari. After the decennial lease settlement, the new system of *olungu* settlement was introduced in 1821. The

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<sup>85</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I, 382; Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 281-282.

<sup>86</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I, 382; Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 282.



*melvaram* or government share was initially fixed as grains; later it was fixed as money based on the current price of the produce. If the current price was less, a standard price was considered. The contract of the *olungu* system was made with individual mirasidars, if he opposed to cultivate, the government made this settlement with ryots. If both refused to cultivate the land, this settlement was made with others. The *muchilikkas* or agreement was made with *mittadars* for the contract of *olungu* system by the Company.<sup>87</sup> The *varam* system<sup>88</sup> was followed in *nanjai land* to fix the land tax. In case of *punjai* land, the tax was collected as money or *tirva* and some portion of the produce.<sup>89</sup> *Varam* or rent system of tax collection was practised in all the taluks of Ramnad Zamindari except Arunthimangalam, Hanumanthagudi, Kuthagainadu, Orur, Kottaipattinam and some villages of Pallimadam taluk where the *tirva* system was enhanced. The *tirva* amount was collected varying from Annas 4-4 to Rs 4-5-8 per acre. In the land of *nanjai taram punjai*, *varam* or *tirva* system was practised till 1822. In 1823 the *tirva* method was introduced in the rest of the taluks of Ramnad Zamindari and the rate of the *tirva* differed from Annas 10-4 to Rs 1-9-9 per acre. In the case of crops which were not irrigated with tank water means the amount of the tax varied from Annas 4-6 to Rs 1-11-0 except Pallimadam where the fixed rate was a maximum rate of Rs 2-14-7 and a minimum of Annas 4. When tank water was used for irrigation, the rate of the rent was fixed as *sarasari* or average

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<sup>87</sup> Ramasamy, *TamilNadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 579-570

<sup>88</sup> *varam* system means the after deducted certain portion from the produce, one half went to *circar* as *melvaram* and half of the produce went to ryot as *kudivaram* share

<sup>89</sup> Nelson, Chapter III, 155-158.

and was collected from the land. The rate of the *punjai vanpayir*<sup>90</sup> assessment in Pallimadam taluk was Rs 12-8-0; the rest of the taluks it was Rs. 2-4-11 per acre and highest rate assessment for betel-vine worked out to Rs. 14-8-0 per acre.<sup>91</sup>

Since 1826 the government issued *pattas*<sup>92</sup> for individual ryots and their rate of the rent was mentioned on the *pattas*. The village head had the right to collect the revenue dues from cultivators and he handed them over to the Zamindar. Under this system, the *melvaram* was fixed as standard price without measuring the total produce of the crops. They followed old land survey but it was not proper. Therefore, the cultivators struggled to pay tax to the Zamindar. The local *karnam* had fixed land rate without getting permission from the Collector and *tahsildar*.<sup>93</sup> Munro reported to the government in 1826, that “the village head, mirasidars, *nattanmakarans*, *karnams* kept fertile land themselves and poor lands were given to the ryots. The *karnams* and *nattanmakarans* collected average land tax from the poor ryots which was called as *ivutaram*. The ryots struggled to pay this tax. The accounts were not clear and confusion might have happened in decennial lease.”<sup>94</sup>

After H.W. Kindersley, G.D. Drury was the Collector in 1828; under him the wet lands were classified as *kannars* or blocks by the order of Board of Directors. They prepared and maintained the accounts of paddy cultivation

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<sup>90</sup> *Vanpayir* means land yielding garden produce in Tinnevely, cultivated in back yards or select spots; consisting of plantains, sugarcane, tobacco, chillies. There was another name was called Toticaul or tottakal produce. *Glossary to the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 48

<sup>91</sup> *Report of Madras Estate Land Act committee*, Part II, 141.

<sup>92</sup> See Appendix No.7 for the original documents of *patta*

<sup>93</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 283-284.

<sup>94</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, 210

followed by *kottais*.<sup>95</sup> In the period from 1829 to 1839, 49,607 square miles of southern India came under the Zamindari System. The districts of Madura, Tinnevelly, North Arcot and Salem millions acres of lands were incorporated with the Zamindari system. In other Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency some part of the land was adopted in the Zamindari tenure.<sup>96</sup> In 1842 to 1844 a new experimental method was followed in four villages of Tinnevelly district (Tinnevelly, Tenkasi, Ambasamudram and Sankarankoil) by E.B.Thomas, Collector of Tinnevelly. Later, the land system was modified based on the circumstances but it was not satisfactory. Around three hundred assessment rates were followed in *kar* and *pisanam* crops cultivation.<sup>97</sup>

The mirasidars claimed the ownership of the dry and wet lands and waste land of the village. In the case of waste land if a cultivator tried to convert it into cultivable land, he had to pay a certain percentage of share to the mirasidar as tax. That tax or fee was called *samibhogam*; the rate of this *samibhogam* was a maximum of five per cent of the total produce. In 1850, the government ordered that if mirasidars left the land uncultivated for maximum five years, anyone can plough the land without entering it in the register. The *olungu* system of assessment was followed by the current price rate of the total produce. But this system was a failure due to the frequent increase of the current market price from 1853. The rate of the produce of the *olungu* system was fixed in the end of the fasli year in April. The peasant was not aware of the rate of assessment until the

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<sup>95</sup> *kottai* means a measure of grains, varying in different places from 21 to 24 *Marakkals*. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 296.

<sup>96</sup> Dharma Kumar., *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 11

<sup>97</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevelly*, 285.

officials fixed it on his produce. The rate was increased which led to the dues of land rents. In 1855 *one-third* of the cultivable wet land was calculated as waste land, and the produce of these lands was utilised by local officers. The village accounts were not properly maintained. Discrimination followed in assessing the land rate of the wealthy and of the underprivileged cultivators. The government ordered to rewrite the land accounts and ratify the mismanagement.<sup>98</sup> *Karnams* followed informal land survey and they could not recognise what the earlier methods of land survey were. In 1857 the total land assessment rate was twenty-eight lakh rupees. Hence in the period of 1859-60 the system of *olungu* needed to be withdrawn and a new settlement called *mottafaisal* was introduced in Ramnad.<sup>99</sup>

#### **8.6. *Mottafaisal* System 1859-1860**

In 1859 the revenue system was modified and a new settlement *mottafaisal*, was introduced. But earlier this system had been tried in Tanjore District and later it was practised in other parts of southern Tamil country. Under this system the *olungu* standard price was fixed with inflexible rate.<sup>100</sup> In 1859-60 after the adoption of the *mottafaisal* system current price of grains was reduced to thirty percent which was favourable to the ryots to pay the assessment. To decide the tax amount of wet and dry lands they maintained two accounts called A and B registers. Among these register the B register was a very important one. The B register contained the total area of the ryot, the cultivated

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<sup>98</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, 210

<sup>99</sup> Ramasamy, *TamilNadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 570-579

<sup>100</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 290.

land for the last fasli year and the unutilised land. In 1864 this register was completed and ryot's name was entered in the register and he had to pay the land assessment which was mentioned in *pattas*. Most of the villages were not surveyed separately. Therefore, this system was theoretically fixed and practically it was confusing. After the framing of the register, the ryot had concessions; they could pay tax on only irrigated lands; for uncultivated or waste land they did not need to pay.<sup>101</sup> After forming these two registers the ryot had got *pattas* for his cultivated land and he was responsible to pay the fixed rate of land assessment. There was no uniformity in fixing the land assessment. There was no proper method in fixing and maintaining the register to assess the land. For assessing the *nanjai* land the government practised the average rate of the total assessment. After the introduction of *mottafaisal*, during 1860 to 1865, eighteen percent of cultivated land was increased. One more effect of the new system was *mirasi* claim vanished. Therefore, after banning the *mirasi* rights, there was controversy while issuing *pattas* as to whether *pattas* were to be handed over to cultivators or mirasidars; finally, *pattas* were given to the ryots. There were three kinds of villages; the first one was *panguvali*<sup>102</sup> villages, which the mirasidars owned. Another was *pattaviritti*,<sup>103</sup> whose mirasidars had rights to enjoy fixed portion of its production. The last one was the *parumpattu* villages, in which there was no intermediary between *circar* and the ryots. For this village

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<sup>101</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 577; Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 290.

<sup>102</sup> *Panguvali villages* means a village held in common by a certain number of coparceners, amongst whom the lands are distributed at various times, according to the votes of the majority of the shares and are held in severalty for a given time under such distribution. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 397.

<sup>103</sup> *Pattavirutti* means rent-free land held by Brahmins. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 409

the government appointed official *nattanmakaran* who collected tax from the village.<sup>104</sup> The rent act of 1859 gave right of occupancy to all cultivators who possessed lands for more than twelve years and forbade the rents from being raised, except for very critical reasons. The Tenancy Act of 1885 allowed the ryot to mortgage his possession and to lease it for periods not exceeding nine years.<sup>105</sup>

## 9. Land, Weight and Currency Measurement

Land measurement was made based on the system of *kolapiramanam* or *paimash*<sup>106</sup> survey. For measuring, *Mahani kol* (a wooden stick) was used. Based on this measurement the land was classified as *nanjai*, *punjai*, *thittu*, *thidal*, *thoppu*, *aaru* and *kulam*.<sup>107</sup> In 1792, the land measurement of Ramnad was introduced throughout the Zamindari by *Pradani* Muthirulappa Pillai. He made a common tool for measuring *nanjai* and *punjai* lands. They followed measurement of a stick  $22 \frac{5}{16}$  of Muthirulappa Pillai's feet (the length measure of 22 feet and a cross measure of 1 foot in length) equal to  $22 \frac{1}{2}$  English feet.<sup>108</sup> In 1795 Ramnad came under the direct control of the Company and in 1811 the Company made a survey of the donated lands and villages by the Zamindars of Ramnad. After the entry of the Company rule, the old system of land

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<sup>104</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, 291.

<sup>105</sup> Arokiaswami and Royappa, *The Modern Economic History of India*, 107.

<sup>106</sup> *Kolapiramanam* means a statement of the whole extent and of the divisions of a village and its lands, whether cultivated or waste. *paimaish* means measurement or survey methods. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 292,422

<sup>107</sup> Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 29,70; Shanmugam, *Setupathi Mannarkalin Samuthaya Porulathara Varalarru*, 82

<sup>108</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 73

measurement of *kolapiramanam* disappeared.<sup>109</sup> During the period of the Company control different kinds of land measurement were followed such as *kurukkam*,<sup>110</sup> *kalavirayadi*,<sup>111</sup> and *kuli*<sup>112</sup>. Zamindars collected different kinds of tax regularly, like *varam*, money, rent or *swarnadeyam*<sup>113</sup> on the *punjai* lands of Ramnad Zamindari. The wet and dry land of the Ramnad Zamindari was measured by the term of *kalavirayadi*. The eight parts of *marakkalvirayadis* and one hundred and twelve parts of *kalavirayadi* were called *nanjaikuli*. The *kurukkam* measurement was used in the *punjai* land only.<sup>114</sup>

For measuring Ghee, grains and oil they used *magani*,<sup>115</sup> *ulakku*, *padi*, *nali*, *kurani*,<sup>116</sup> *marakkal*<sup>117</sup> and *kalam*<sup>118</sup>. Among them *magani* was the smallest one. The following tables show the weights and measures used by bazaar men and the public of Ramnad Zamindari:

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<sup>109</sup> Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 31,70

<sup>110</sup> One *kurukkam* was equal to 90 cents in all the taluks of Ramnad estate except Pallidmadam where calculated as one *kuli* was equal to 7 acres 65-9/16 cents. The *panam* was calculated all the taluks except Pallimadam was equal to Rs 0-2-0-8/23, in Pallimadam it was Rs 0-3-4-8/11. *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part II*, 130

<sup>111</sup> One *kalavirayadi* was equal to 14 *marakkalvirayadis* or 1 acre 18 1/8 cents. *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part II*, 128

<sup>112</sup> *kuli* means a measure of one square foot. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 301.

<sup>113</sup> rent or revenue collected in money not in kind

<sup>114</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statement part III*, 344; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 280-284

<sup>115</sup> *Magani* was a rate of interest calculated in grains. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 316.

<sup>116</sup> *Kuruni* a measure equal to twelfth of a *kalam*. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 305.

<sup>117</sup> *marakkal* means a grain measure in use at Madras, containing 8 padis or measures and being one-twelfth of a *kalam*; it formerly consisted of 750 cubic inches, but is now fixed at 800 cubic inches: 400 *marakkals*=1 *garisa* or *garee*. A *Marakkal* of rice or salt weigh 960 rupees = 12 sers, or 241b.6oz; Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 331.

<sup>118</sup> One *kalam* equal to twelve *marakkals*. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 251. According to S.M. Kamal, One *kalam* was equal to *ninety padi* of paddy. Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 246.

<b>Weight</b>	
6 Queen's silver Rupees weight	1 pollam
20 pollams	1 Viss
120 Pollams or 6 viss	1 Thulam
<b>Grains and liquids measurements</b>	
135 Queen's silver Rupees weight	1 Pakka measure
6 Measures	1 Marakkal
15 Marakkals	1 kalam
One measure of Paddy	169 seers of 80 tolas <sup>119</sup> a seer.

<b>Currency</b>	<b>Rs A P</b>
1 Kali panam	0 3 4
1 Suli panam	0 2 0
1 Vellippanam	0 2 6
1 Pon	10 fanams

Source: Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 72-74.

## 10. Zamindars Measures and Methods of Tax Collection

The Ramnad area<sup>120</sup> was mostly Zamindari and some parts of the land were *inam* lands. The following charts show the talukwise classification of the land in the Ramnad Zamindari. In Ramnad, land was divided into two categories, *nanjai* and *punjai*. In the first half of the nineteenth century under the *Pradani*

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<sup>119</sup> *Tolas* and *seer* means a weight measurement Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 274,524.

<sup>120</sup> Pamela G Price noted that, Ramnad Zamindari consisted approximately 2000 square miles and included about 2167 villages. about 2167 villages, among them 827 villages were *inam* granted land, rest of the 1340 villages were came under the direct management of the government or estate control. Pamela, G Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, p.8. According to *fifth report*, total number of villages in the Ramnad Zamindari was 2152. Cultivable land was 538,000 acres; twenty-five to thirty percent of the land was waste land throughout the nineteenth century. *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, Madras Presidency*, Vol II, p.562. According to Pharoah, the total number of villages were 2,162 and 574 hamlets. Pharoah, *A Gazetteer of Southern India* (Madras: Pharoah and Co, 1855), 382.



Muthirulappa Pillai, these two major land divisions were sub classified into six sub-groups based on the nature and condition of the soil, such as *nanjai proper*,<sup>121</sup>*nanjai vanpayir*, *nunjaitaram punjai*, *punjai proper*, *punjai vanpayir* and *kolamkorvai*.<sup>122</sup> The Board of Revenue records indicate the method of land revenue practised in the Ramnad Zamindari as follows;

1. *Nanjai* land paid rent in kind, based on harvest of the total produce (for paddy cultivation)

2. *Nanjai vanpayir* type of land paid money as a specific assessment on each product. (for the cultivation of betel, vine, sugar cane, plantain etc.)

3. *Punjai vanpayir* paid money like ordinary *punjai* assessment except when the cultivation was raised on *nanjai* land other than those set apart for *nunja* cultivation, in which case specific assessment on products was paid. (*Punjai vanpayir* land products were chillies, brinjal, tobacco, sweat potato, etc..)

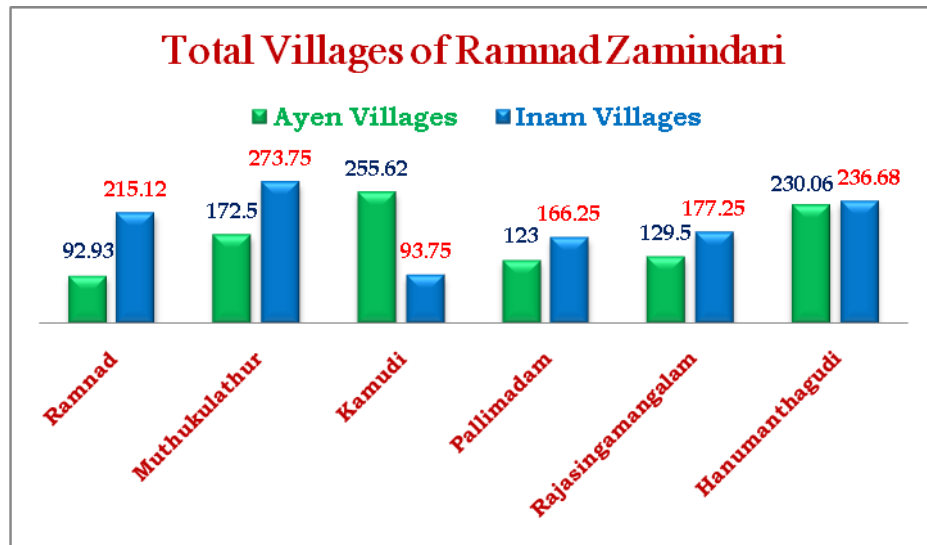
4. *Nanjaitaram punjai*, *punjai* and *kolamkorvai* lands paid rent as money, fixed on land, irrespective of the nature of crop raised. *Kolamkorvai* was a land tax on produce of paddy cultivation made on the bed of tanks.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Nanjai proper* means land suitable for paddy cultivation, *Nanjai vanpayir* means special crops cultivated land like betel, sugarcane, plantain etc. *Nanjaitaram Punjai* land not fit for paddy cultivation and fit only for ragi, cholam and dry grains. *Punjai proper* land mostly dry and suitable for dry grains, *Punjai vanpayir* land classified for cultivating chillies, brinjals and sweet potatoes etc. and *Kolamkorvai* means the paddy cultivated with the bed of tanks without limits of the waters spread, limits of water spread was prohibited; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 287-288.

<sup>122</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 290.

<sup>123</sup> *Board of Revenue*, dated 21.12.1882, No. 3198. 19; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 290-292.; *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part II, 123.



Source: *Proceedings of Court of Wards Madras*, dated on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1883, no. 1845.4.

Ramnad Zamindari had six taluks: first Ramnad was mostly covered by sand, apart from this *karisal*, *veppal* and *pottal* types of land were found in the entire estate. Secondly, Muthukulathur Taluk was covered mostly by sand, *karisal*, *veppal* and *sevval*. Thirdly, Kamudi Taluk fully consisted of sand or *manal*, *karisal* and *sevval*. Fourthly, Pallimadam Taluk generally *karisal* and *veppal* land. Fifth, Rajasingamangalam Taluk, had *pottal*, *vandal*(aluvial) and *sand* in the coastal part, other part being by *karisal* land. Sixth taluk, Hanumanthakudi had mostly *pottal*, *vandal* and *karisal* lands.<sup>124</sup>

The northern part of the zamindari soil was fully *pottal* and *vandal*, Saligramam and Rajasingamangalam consisted highest wet land or *vandal* type of land. Eastern side of Ramnad Zamindari mostly was sandy and southern part of the Ramnad taluk was covered with *karisal*, *veppal* and *sevval* soil. The *karisal*

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<sup>124</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 152-195

type of soil fully covered lower part of Pallimadam taluk, Kamudi, Papankulam, Muthukulathur and Abiramam.<sup>125</sup> The following headwise charges were collected by British government from Ramnad Zamindari such as,

1. Establishment and Contingencies
2. Maramut
3. *Peshcush*
4. Interest on loan to government
5. Debt due by the estate
6. Road-cess
7. Commission due to government
8. Maintenance and education of minors
9. Allowance to other members of the family
10. Miscellaneous items.<sup>126</sup>

According to the *Madras Estate Land Act Committee* report, the land revenue collection was categorised *varam*, *sarasari*, *tirva*, *cesses* and *miscellaneous*. *Varam* tax was fixed when the ryot made harvest in his land.<sup>127</sup> In the beginning of nineteenth century, *yavana*<sup>128</sup> was also one kind of land assessment on wet lands and from this assessment the government received one lakh rupees, but in 1807 this tax was abolished. In 1855 the tax on *vanpayir* or *bagayat* was declared at the 'double rate' of the wet land crops. The *pattam*<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector* on 05.02.1882, 18

<sup>126</sup> *Board of Revenue, Court of Wards* 1883 Madras, 23 June 1883, No. 1845

<sup>127</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, 344.

<sup>128</sup> *Yavana* means money paid to the collector or manager from the land revenue. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 560.

<sup>129</sup> *Pattam* means rent, hire, contract or lease. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 409.

and *poruppu*<sup>130</sup> were the kind of charges collected as ‘quit-rent’ imposed on granted lands or Inam lands.<sup>131</sup> For *nanjai* or wet land, generally tax or *varam* was collected as half of the produce and additionally *nilavari* or land tax was collected on paddy cultivated areas whether it was wet land or dry land. Ryots were demanded to pay the land rents and ordered to pay compulsory payment for arrangements (like travel allowance and needed things). It was practised until 1857. In case of *punjai* land the rate of rent was collected from 8 annas to two rupees per acre.<sup>132</sup> There was *sarasari* rent collected from the ryot when he used tank water for irrigation. The rate of *punjai vanpayir* assessment differed in Pallimadam taluk due to the nature of the soil as compared with other taluks. The rate of the *punjai vanpayir* measurement of Pallimadam taluk was Rs 12-8-0 and in the rest of the taluks of Ramnad Zamindari was Rs 2-4-11 per acre.<sup>133</sup> There was unique assessment followed in the taluk of Pallimadam due to the condition of soil which was somewhat better than that of other taluks of Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>134</sup>

The revenue assessment on *nanjai* land was paid in kind varying with the harvest. *nanjai vanpayir* was paid in money a specific assessment on each product; in the case of *punjai vanpayir* it was money. For the *nanjaitaram punjai*, *punjai* and *kolamkorvai* land rent was paid as money fixed on land, irrespective of the nature of the crop raised. For the trees a specific tax on the kind of tree was

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<sup>130</sup> *Poruppu* means a low or quit-rent levied from lands usually granted in Inam or rent-free. *Glossary to the Fifth Report from the Select Committee*, 454

<sup>131</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 575

<sup>132</sup> *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 112; Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 576

<sup>133</sup> *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 141

<sup>134</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part III, 347

collected when it was collected come to fruition.<sup>135</sup> The land tax was collected by *maniyakar* or *ambalagar* (village revenue officer). They were accountable to their head officer *makanam*. The land tax was collected as half of the produce in kind; later it was changed to cash. The Company officials used to calculate approximately the total produce of the land. The Company officials used to encourage the progress of cultivation to get more revenue. The government share of the *pisanam* cultivation was *three-fifths* of the total produce. The harvested crops were under the control of officials until the products were sold.<sup>136</sup>

In the case of agricultural production, the share of common charge was different in all the taluks of Ramnad Zamindari. In Arunuthimangalam, Kuthagainadu, Orur and Kottaipattinam taluks common charge was collected at twenty percent and in the case of Ramnad, Kilakkad and Sickal taluk it was charged at ten percent. But in Kottaipattinam taluk share of common charge was deducted as four *kalams*, eleven *Marakkals* and five and half measures made for every 24 *kalams* of the gross produce.<sup>137</sup>

The share of the Zamindar was *melvaram* and *kudivaram* or *kilvaram* share was the Cultivator's share. The Government officers got grains of the produce which was known *cutantaram* or *cuvantiram* for salary. The *pallans* or *kudumbans* served as village measurers in some of the villages and had the right to get *cuvantiram* share from the produce. *kudi cuvantaram* was also one of the shares of the produce which was given for the village temple and was used to

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<sup>135</sup> *Board of Revenue* 21.12.1882, No. 3198 19

<sup>136</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 566-568.

<sup>137</sup> *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 118

maintain irrigation on temple lands.<sup>138</sup> Tenants' share was stored in nearby *melvaram* granary and after getting receipt from *maniyakar*, the ryot could take their *kudivaram* or *kilvaram* to home. In the case tenant had taken both *melvaram* and *kudivaram* shares without permission from superintendant he had to pay the highest produce of his field as punishment. The ryot could not dig tank or well within the fifty yards from the *circar* canal or tank, and thirty yards from the estate tanks. Betal cultivation was prohibited, because the cultivation of betel did not yield more revenue to the government. If the ryot cultivated it he it had to pay double tax. For betel cultivation tax was fixed during the picking-up of a single leaf, and also a transit duty was imposed. The ryot could pay *punjai*, *nanjai* assessment and tree tax in seven instalments;<sup>139</sup> if he failed to pay certain instalment that amount was considered an arrear amount and would be collected next payment with one percent of interest.<sup>140</sup>

The paddy cultivation on the *nanjai* land had a fixed tax of forty-eight percent; the ryot were responsible to pay this assessment as government share. In some parts of Ramnad, like Arunuthimangalam, Kuthagainadu and Orur, the payment of *melvaram* was fixed as fifty percent. Under the system of sharing system, the ryot had to pay whatever he cultivated on his field; the share of the total produce must be handed over to estate and without getting permission from government official the ryot could not harvest his crops. For harvesting paddy or other crops the ryot had to get permission from village officers or *tahsildar*

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<sup>138</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 78

<sup>139</sup> Pavali Zamin collected monthly four instalments, Kannivadi estate and Ammanayakkanur Zamin collected eight instalments and Idayankottai Zamin of Madura country collected monthly seven instalments. *Report of Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 166-197

<sup>140</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 331-333

which was known as '*kanganam chit*'.<sup>141</sup> For that the ryot had to travel more than thirty miles to get approval or *kanganam chit* from government officials. After getting this receipt the ryot could harvest his crops. The *kanganam* officer was in charge of dividing the *melvaram* and *kudivaram* shares from the total produce. While dividing the *melvaram* share one of the duplicate copies of the chit had to be handed over to *peishkar*(dividing officer) for dividing the share of the produce.<sup>142</sup> But during the period of harvesting, the officers of the Zamindars delayed the issuance of permission letter or *kanganam chit*. As a consequence the crops were ruined.<sup>143</sup> The paddy crop of the *nanjai* land failed owing to the paucity of water for the grow of the grain was called '*suddashavi*'. The crops decayed owing to the flood after the sprouting of grains. It was called '*manipidshavi*'. After the verification of the loss by the estate officials ryot might be exempted from the payment of the rent or share.<sup>144</sup>

Maravans and Vellalans were of land-owning caste, dependant on *pallans* and *paraiyan* community for cultivating their lands. The irrigation related share was utilised by Maravan headman or *Ambalagar*, *Pallan* caste or *nirppaccis* (water turner), *konan* or *mukkuntar* (head of *konar* caste) gave sluice goat for sacrificing; and *paraiyan* was the watcher of tanks, channels and sluices. The other castes or artisans and servants of villages too received shares of the produce such as carpenters, blacksmith, barbers, merchants, watchman, leather workers,

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<sup>141</sup> *Kanganam chit* means the receipt of the permission for harvesting the crop to the Ryot from government officials. Village granary was called *segarampattadai*; Ram Row *Ramnad Manual*, 455-457. This receipt was valid for one day; ryot should use this receipt before 8 pm after that it was not valid

<sup>142</sup> *Estate land Act Committee Landholders' Statement*, Part III, 345; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 79, 454

<sup>143</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, 13

<sup>144</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statement Part III*, 346

and grave diggers. They got unmeasured handouts of the harvest called *kaipiccai* (taking grains by hands by the village officials). The cultivators gave tiny portions to the low caste village servants, like barbers, leather workers, drummers or grave diggers. The tenants were responsible to pay ten to forty percent of the total produce to Zamindars, additionally five percent for public expenses or *potu cilavu* like tank digging (*kulavettu* or *kulavattai*) to Zamindar. The cultivator had to pay the *kanganam* for supervision of the harvest.<sup>145</sup> The total produce of the harvest was mostly consumed by Zamindar; the rest of the produce was spread over to various officers and caste people. Ultimately a small amount of the produce was left in the sub tenant's hand.

The Company collected special tax on government officials known as *umbalavari* which was collected from *karnam*, *ambalagars* and other mirasidars. The rate of the tax was collected at 5 or 10 percent of the produce.<sup>146</sup> *Kalappichchai*,<sup>147</sup> *padakanikkai*<sup>148</sup> and *palankatchi*<sup>149</sup> were collected additionally apart from the usual tax.<sup>150</sup> The well tax was fixed at two *fanam* per well for cultivating the land. In the region of Paramakudi, there was a peculiar tax, collected on dry land cultivation. The ryot had to pay rent for the crop before the crop's cultivation.<sup>151</sup> The cultivation of *porumpokku* or common land was

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<sup>145</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 78-79

<sup>146</sup> *Estate land Act Committee Landholders' Statement*, Part III, 351

<sup>147</sup> alms at the threshing floor measured

<sup>148</sup> *Padakanikkai* means a present placed at the feet of Zamindar or landlord. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 385.

<sup>149</sup> *Palankatchi* means a present made to the Zamindar when the glad used of the dry crops being reap was given by ryot. *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statement Part III*, 352

<sup>150</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part II, 122; Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 79

<sup>151</sup> *Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector* dated 05.02.1882 17; *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part II, 122



prohibited, like car track, *Oorani* (drinking water ponds), thrashing floor, burning and burial ground and etc. *Oorani* water was not allowed for the purpose of irrigation.<sup>152</sup> Zamindars followed and collected different kinds of rate, based on the nature of the soil and produce. Ryots cultivated crops in the *nanjai* land. If well water was used for the land, rent was fixed at Rs 12-8-0 per acre for the first crops. In the case of second crop, with well water, the rate of the assessment was fixed at Rs 6-4-0. The rate for the *punjai* land was fixed in a range of 6 to 12 annas for acre.<sup>153</sup>

There was average tax collected where the tank water was used without getting permission from government officers. The average tax was collected on the cultivated crops of the *nanjai* land.<sup>154</sup> The ryot made a contract with proprietor for cultivating his land for certain amount for a period. It was known as *pathadappu*. In this case, the ryot was responsible to pay whether the cultivated or not on the land.<sup>155</sup> Ramnad Zamindari collected additional cess apart from *mamul tirva* or customs tax like *nilavari* (land tax), *vaikkolvari* (straw tax), which was paid by the Pallimadam taluk cultivators for the *punjai* land. This tax was collected from *cowledar* and in the Taluk of Pallimadam an additional well tax too had to be paid by the ryot. The well tax was two *fanam* per well which was used to cultivate the land.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statement* Part III, 350-352

<sup>153</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part II, 112-113

<sup>154</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 123

<sup>155</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part I, 346

<sup>156</sup> *Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector*, dated 05.02.1882 17; *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part II, 122

The Zamindars imposed tree taxes which stood on *patta* lands. In the village of Sickal, tree tax was imposed at the rate of 8 *annas* per coconut tree, and other trees the rate<sup>157</sup> was assessed as five *annas* to four paise per tree. In Ramnad Taluk tree tax was assessed as two *annas* and in other taluks one *anna* and three paise were collected by Zamindars.<sup>158</sup> In 1855, the Madras Government banned the tree tax in the entire Madras Presidency except in Ramnad, Tinnevely and Salem areas where Palmyra trees tax was continued, this tax was the major source of income for the government in these regions. In Ramnad region from Palmyra trees the government collected rupees one lakh as tree tax.<sup>159</sup> The landowners got half share of the tree in the southern part of Ramnad Zamindari where they leased their land. In Rajasingamanagalm and Aranuthimangalam Taluks they collected 40 percent and in the Taluks of Hanumanthakudi, Kuthagainadu, Orur and Kottaipattinam tree share was collected as 33 1/3 percent in Ramnad Zamindari. Zamindars collected Rs 9-15-9 as the rate of sugarcane cultivation. Plantain was cultivated in all the taluks of Ramnad Zamindari; and a fixed rent of Rs 14-13-7 per annum in Pallimadam taluk, and Rs 4-7-0 in the rest of the taluks were collected. After 1858, money collection was practised in some parts of the taluks of the estate. Later it was fixed in all the taluks. Zamindars collected half share of the total produce on the

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<sup>157</sup> For General trees fixed as 10 pies, for Guava tree fixed as one anna three pies, for lime tree three annas four pies, Pomegranate tree charged as 10 pies, Markova tree one anna three pies, and mango tree six annas 8 pies. *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 115

<sup>158</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 115

<sup>159</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 580

cultivation of second crop which was mostly of *kattaiparuthi* (Cotton on last year's stubbles) and *kattamanacku* (castor oil seed).<sup>160</sup>

The ryot had to pay money to landholder which was not included in rent; it was considered payable to the government not included in the rate of the produce. Further the Board of Revenue noticed that whether such dues were paid in money or kind whether paid to *rajah*, *jagirdars*, *zamindar*, or government officers, it was considered as due amount to the government.<sup>161</sup> During the period between 1872 and 1886, the total amount of the demand of the government was Rs. 10,67,207 but the collected amount was Rs 71,64,100; and total arrears of the *peshcush* amount was Rs 35,07,967.<sup>162</sup> Thus the Zamindars increased the tax amount to compensate for their arrears.

## **11. Land Revenue in Ramnad from 1787-1888**

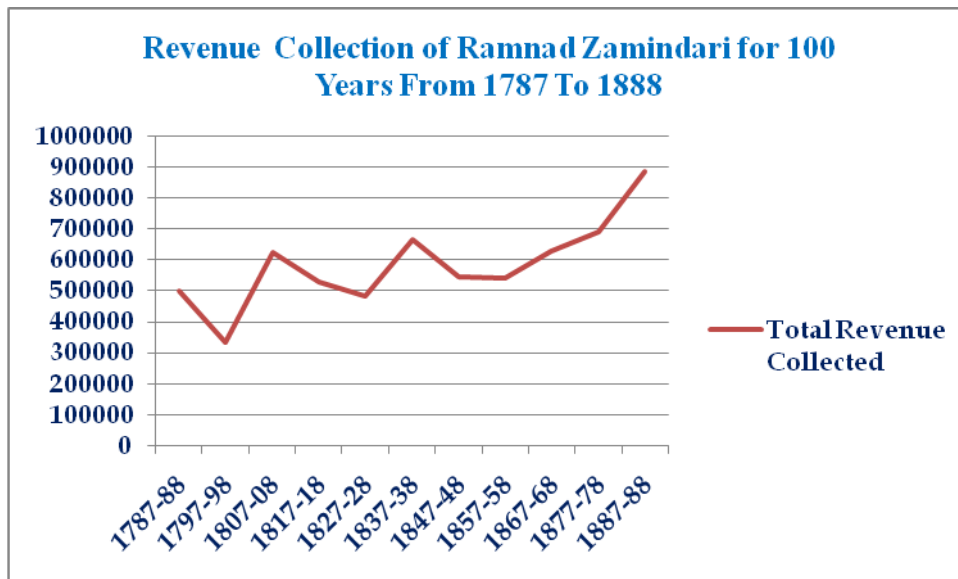
The following chart shows the revenue collection of Ramnad Zamindari from 1787 to 1888.

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<sup>160</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 120-123

<sup>161</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part I, p.222

<sup>162</sup> *E. Turner Collector's letter to Court of Wards*, dated 12.10.1887



Source: Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 1891, 11

The above chart shows a hundred years' land revenue statistical record of Ramnad Zamindari from 1787 to 1888.<sup>163</sup> The above sources clearly demonstrate the variation of the land revenues before the Zamindari settlement, under the Zamindars management and Court of Wards' control of Ramnad. In 1795 when Ramnad came under the Company rule the land revenue was rupees 3,32,102; after the Zamindari settlement the land revenue of 1807-08 was rupees 6,24,305 which shows that the zamindari settlement filled the treasury of the Company. During the period of Court of Wards management there was more income and it increased in Zamindar's management. At the beginning of the Zamindari settlement, the revenue was rupees 6, 24,305 (1807-08) and at the end of the nineteenth century or 1888, the revenue from the Zamindari system was rupees 8, 84,121. It clearly indicates that the colonial land revenue policy towards Ramnad achieved great results.

<sup>163</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 11

Since 1795, Ramnad came under the direct control of the British. After the conversion of Ramnad to Zamindari tenure, which was, for a short period, controlled by the Court of Wards, Ramnad faced issues of succession and civil disputes among Setupathis. During the periods of 1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889, Ramnad was under the control of Court of Wards. The Court of Wards' management gave more importance and spent more to promote land revenue. The following table shows the Court of ward's expenditure on irrigation work in the Ramnad Zamindari during 1873 and 1887:

<b>SL. No</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Amount of Expenditure in Rupees</b>
1	1873	29,209
2	1874	29,675
3	1875	29,687
4	1876	93,233
5	1877	61,594
6	1878	1,09,122
7	1879	43,644
8	1880	22,286
9	1881	26,878
10	1882	27,577
11	1883	32,359
12	1884	40,399
13	1885	96,948
14	1886	51,178
15	1887	42,318
<b>Total</b>		<b>7,36,107</b>

Source: *Madras Estate Land Act Committee, Collectors' Report*, 258.

The above statement gives a picture of year wise expenditure on irrigation. In 1878 the British government allotted and spent more (Rs. 1,09,122)

owing to the impact of the great famine of 1876-78. According to irrigation report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee stated that there were no records to support this expenditure as claim that the Court of Wards, spent Rs 8,29,110-1-3 during the period between 1873 and 1889 for the improvement of irrigation. Further there are no records to show the subsequent progress until 1935. Again in 1935 Collector's statement mentioned Rs 4,71,971 spent for irrigation improvement but there were no records to support this expenditure too.<sup>164</sup> The irrigation report is significant, considering the peasants and landless labourers' struggle for surviving.

Sl. No	Major Irrigation sources of Ramnad Zamindari	Tanks under on River	Amount spent for repair from 1873 to 1882		
			Rs	A	P
1	Vaigai	39	86,775	14	11
2	Raguntha kaveri	23	1,08,511	1	9
3	Narayana kaveri	5	2,449	8	2
4	Ghirutamalai	3	8,450	8	2
5	Kotta karai	6	2,716	4	2
6	Virusilai	12	5,418	10	10
7	Pambar	4	6,303	8	5
8	Thenar	1	1,421	5	11
9	Manimuktar	4	2,541	4	7
10	Vellar	2	334	10	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>2,24,922</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: *Board of Revenue, Court of Wards* 1883, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1883, No. 1845.

<sup>164</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part II, 231.

The above statement shows that the British government gave more emphasis on and intended to get more income from the land; so they used more amounts of money to maintain the natural sources. The Company wanted to get the arrear and debt amounts from the Setupathis; therefore the Court of Wards was involved seriously in the improvement and progress of agricultural production, thereby attempted to resolve the zamindars debts and arrears with interest of Rs 25,84,892 by 1888.<sup>165</sup>

## **12. Impact of Zamindari system on Peasants**

Zamindari system created an elaborate system of official hierarchy and a long chain of intermediaries like, zamindar, talukdar and karnam between the state and actual cultivators of the land. The establishment of British rule in the southern Tamil country destroyed the tyrannical rule of local chieftains through regulating law and order. They measured the land and appointed district Collectors to collect revenue which action mitigated the oppressive treatment of cultivators and landless peasants by local poligars or chieftains. But the zamindars who replaced the local chieftains under the permanent settlement also proved oppressive in collecting tax from the peasants. The peasants expected justice from the courts of the English but that was not possible to get easily. They faced poverty due to non-natural, man-made causes and frequent atrocities of landlords and struggled a lot to maintain their daily life. In Chinglepet, Salem, Dindigul, Ramnad and Tinnevely the system of permanent settlement failed and frequently the British had to take over control of zamindari land. The Board of

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<sup>165</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 500

Revenue analysed and understood that over assessment of land and ignorance and lack of interest of Zamindars to cultivate the land were some of the important reasons reason for the failure. The permanent settlement was continued until 1921-22 in the Tamil region.<sup>166</sup> The permanent settlement led to the decay of the village community and peasantry.<sup>167</sup> Due to the failure of the permanent system, a large part of the land was reverted to the government. Village settlement which was recommended by the Tanjore committee report of 1807 was implemented in the Tanjore region.<sup>168</sup> The permanent settlement failed in Bengal due to bribery and mismanagement of the accounts. The British tried this system in the southern Tamil country, but here too permanent settlement was not successful.<sup>169</sup>

### 13. Overview

In the nineteenth century, in the Madras Presidency, out of 90 million acres of cultivating area, 27½ millions of total area was held by 849 Zamindars. Among them fifteen zamindars held 6¾ million acres. They were paying around two lakh rupees as *peshcush* to the government and 128 zamindars held 9½ millions of acres; they paid regularly a *peshcush* amount of 18,100 rupees to the government. 706 zamindars and *mittadars* held land of 2¾ million acres and paid a *peshcush* amount of 1,300 rupees to the Government annually.<sup>170</sup> A million acres of land was under the Zamindar system in Madura, North Arcot and Salem

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<sup>166</sup> Rajayyan., *Tamilnadu A Real History*, 310

<sup>167</sup> Arokiaswami and Royappa, *The Modern Economic History of India*, 102-103.

<sup>168</sup> Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration*, 86-87.

<sup>169</sup> Rajayyan., *Tamilnadu A Real History*, 311.

<sup>170</sup> Srinivasa Ragavaiyengar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 132.



Districts.<sup>171</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century in Madras, Bernard S Cohn mentions 804 Zamindars controlled 40 per cent of the land. The remaining 60 percent was in Ryotwari tenure.<sup>172</sup> In Ramnad, the Ryotwari system was not practised owing to the nature of the soil and to get the arrear amount of the Zamindars of Ramnad. The Zamindari system was structured in the economic and social hierarchical order in the Ramnad society. The settlement brought about dynamic changes in the agriculture field and the agrarian order. This system created social imbalance in the Ramnad society which was based on the agriculture.

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<sup>171</sup> Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 11

<sup>172</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'Recruitment of Elites in India under British Rule,' in *Essays in Comparative Social Stratification*, ed. Leonard Plotnicov and Arthur Tuden (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1970), 132.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Power and Control of Land in Ramnad Zamindari**

#### **Contents**

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11. Overview

Land is one of the sources of human evaluation of wealth. Land-owning and holding-right are vital in deciding the social hierarchy in India, especially in rural society. Land ownership decides if social groups are superior or remain suppressed.

Tamil Classical literature classifies lands into five divisions known as *tinai*, such as *kurinchi*, *mullai*, *marudam*, *neythal* and *palai*.<sup>1</sup> These land divisions were inhabited by respective groups of people known as *kuravar*, *ayer*, *vellalar*, *parathavar* and *maravar* respectively. Their occupations were classified as honey-tapper, cattle rider, agriculturalist, fisher folk and warriors, correspondingly based on the nature of the soil.<sup>2</sup> These five regional people migrated to other locations for various reasons like employment needs, epidemic disease, famine and other natural calamities. The classical age social setup was classified based on profession and nature of the soil, like *idaiyar*, *iyavar*, *umanar*, *ulavar*, *weaver*, *kuravar*, *kurumbar*, *kollar*, *tachchar*, *parathavar*, *pulayar*, *porunar* and *vedar*. They had settlements in various regions with different occupations.<sup>3</sup> Later these groups fought among themselves for social superiority. During the middle ages the land played a major role in deciding power and legitimacy. Landowning rights had made dynamic changes in the political and socio-economic background of India from classical to the present period.

## 1. Pre-Zamindari Settlement and Social Stratification

Under the Nayaks of Madurai, privileged and socially superior positions were held only by Brahmins, Vellalans, Maravans and other so-called caste Hindus. The Brahmins and caste Hindus served as priests and official servants and were found in military services in the Madura country.<sup>4</sup> For example Ramapayyan, who was

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkappiyar, *Tolkapiyam, Porulathikaram*, 5, 11.

<sup>2</sup> The *kurinchi* land was fully covered by mountains, people engaged with hunting as their natural occupation and they called as *kanavar*, *vettuvar* and *punavar*. In *mullai* land people's major occupation was cattle riding. The *marutham* land was the fertile and cultivable land. They engaged in agriculturalist, therefore they called as *ulavar*. Tamil literature, *Perumbanattrupadai* indicate the coastal region people who involved in fishing and selling fish called as *parathavar*. Ramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture* Vol 3, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Sivakala, *Trading Communities in Early Tamilagam*, 14-15; Ramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture* Vol 3, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual*, 3.

Brahmin, served as commander-in-chief under Thirmalai Nayak's army.<sup>5</sup> According to T. Raja Ram Rao, Vellalans<sup>6</sup> considered themselves equal to Brahmins; therefore they were eager to practice the rituals and customs of Brahmins like wearing thread and giving up taking meat and liquor. The Vellalan community people were mostly landowning; some of them served as *karnam*<sup>7</sup> especially *Sembunattu* Vellalans served as village accountants and some of the Vellalans were involved in trade.<sup>8</sup> The Maravans,<sup>9</sup> belonged to the warrior castes and got land grants for their military services in the classical age. The Ramnad Setupathi belonged to the Maravan caste and granted land to warriors who were mostly Maravans and Kallans. Apart from soldiers of these two castes, Agambadians served in fortresses and public offices and received remuneration for their service. They were called *Sevaikaran*,<sup>10</sup> which term later came to be called *Servaikaran*.<sup>11</sup> They were landholders in lieu of their military and guard services. Ordinary soldiers got land grants capable of producing five

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<sup>5</sup> Lalitha, *Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai*, 232.

<sup>6</sup> Vellalans had six sub divisions like *Pandi* Vellalans (found mostly Ramnad and Pallimadam Taluk), *Arumbukutti* Vellalans (part of Rajasingamangalam Taluk), *Kodickal* Vellalans (entire Ramnad), *Sembunattu* Vellalans (Ramnad, Kamudi, Muthukulathur and Rajasingamangalam), *Kurumbu* Vellalans (part of Hanumantagudi Taluk) and *Malaikatti* Vellalans (part of Hanumantagudi Taluk). Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 29. There were different views about of the sub caste and sub division of Vellalans. Vellalan community people had title like *pillai* and *muthali* (first place) in Ramnad

<sup>7</sup> *Karnam* means village accountant

<sup>8</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 29; W. Francis, *Madura Gazetteer* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1906), 137-138.

<sup>9</sup> Ram Rao described the *maravan* means 'maraven' or 'i will never forget'. *Ramnad Manual* noticed that Maravans were the inhabitants of the Ramnad and found large number in seventeenth century. They were found mostly in Ramnad, Muthukulathur and some part of Kamudi. They were changed their violent and turbulent nature into cultivations during the period of nineteenth century. Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 30-31; Nelson says that 'Maravans were the most powerful caste during the Pandyanadu or Pandyamandalam'. Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual*, 38. According to S. Kadhivel, Maravans were migrated from Ramnad to Tirunelveli, but their date of migration was controversial. The Uthumalai *palayam* records show that they were migrated from Ramnad to Uthumalai in Tirunelveli district which occurred in the eleventh century A.D. And another record of Vadagarai *palayam* records says that they moved from Ramnad to Vadagarai in Tirunelveli district in 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But Singampatti, Urkad and Seithur Maravans migrated earlier than Uthumalai and Vadagarai *palayam*. They were migrated to Tirunelveli region in the different period. Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> According to Edgar Thurston, Kattu Tottiyans castes of Tirunelveli called as Mandai Peridanakkaran or *Servaikaran*. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India* Vol. VII, 184.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual*, 43.

*kalams*<sup>12</sup> a year. The soldier's land grant yielded seven *kalams*. The chief of the one hundred soldiers got *jeevitham* (military service grant) land which could produce fifty *kalams*. The state collected taxes of five *fanams*<sup>13</sup> from these granted lands.<sup>14</sup> Maravans of Ramnad mostly served as soldiers in the Zamin's military force and the rest of the Maravans worked in the Zamindar's palace and public offices. Some of them were involved in cultivating the field and they paid tribute called 'varisai varam' to the Zamindar, who made it compulsory with no exception for drought or bad seasons. According to *Ramnad Manual* Maravans had seven subdivisions<sup>15</sup> and they were superior to Shanans, Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. Maravan rulers of Ramnad were the protector or *Tharmakartha* of temples such as Rameswaram, Uthirakosamangai and they were the guardians of the temples of Ramnad Kingdom.

Tottiyans, Kambalattan, Vadugan and Kaveris were called themselves Nayakkans. They had migrated from Telugu country or Andhra during sixteenth century and settled in and around Madura Country. Mackenzie's manuscript notes that Tottiyans were identified as Kambalattans.<sup>16</sup> Kaveries and Vadugans (Telugu speaking castes) were land owners of Ramnad and some of them were involved in agricultural work, in domestic works and were lower grade labourers in government offices. Later among the Kaveries some of them were involved in trade and sold glass bangles; they were called *chetties* and those who were involved in cultivation were

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<sup>12</sup> *Kalam* means threshing-floor. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Fanam* means a silver coin, 12¼ *fanam* equal to one rupee. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 155.

<sup>14</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Sembunattu, Kondayan Kottai, Appanur Nattu, Agata, Oriyur, Upu kottai and Kuruchi Kattu* Maravans. Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 30-31. But Kadhivel stated that there were eleven subdivisions of Maravans, such as *Sembunattu, Kondayamkottai, Siruthali Katti, Vanniya, Pandara, Karana, Appanur Nattu, Agatha, Uppu Kottai, Kurinchi* and *Servaikara* Maravans. Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 35-36; Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India* Vol. VII, 183-197.

known as Reddies.<sup>17</sup> Vadugans, Kaveris, Rajus,<sup>18</sup> Reddies and Kambalattan and Tottians migrated from Andra and settled in Southern Tamil country during the period of Nayaks of Madura. A small number of Rajus served as personal assistants to Ramnad Setupathis and they were appointed as guards of *zenanas* or *Queen's quarters*. Some worked in the agricultural field. The western poligars of Madura, Tinnevely and a few parts of Coimbatore and Salem belonged to the Tottiyans caste, Tottiyans or Kambalattan settled mostly in the Madura, Tinnevely, Coimbatore and Salem districts.<sup>19</sup> Pattunulkarars or silk thread weavers migrated from Sourashtra (Gujarat) to southern Tamil country during the sixteenth century. Kaikkolars,<sup>20</sup> the traditional weaving community, settled in Tamil country during the period of Pallavas and later Cholas. They believed themselves as next place of Vellalans in the social ranking and they called themselves '*Senguntha*<sup>21</sup> *Muthaliyar*'.<sup>22</sup> The social setup that prevailed in the southern Tamil country during the rule of the Nawab of Carnatic was structuralised based on the social and economic superiority continued during the Colonial rule also. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the political transformation of power and authority from Arcot Nawab to the Company paved the way for a new economic and social set-up, based on the British economic policy towards southern Tamil country.

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<sup>17</sup> Pillay, *Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum*, 332; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Rajus community people initially settled at Keelarajakularaman (located 20 km towards the east of Rajapalayam) and later they permanently shifted and settled new place west of Keelarajakularaman later it was known as Rajapalayam

<sup>19</sup> Lalitha, *Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai*, 154-159.

<sup>20</sup> *Ramnad Manual* listing out the weaving communities of Ramnad such as *Pattunulkarars*, *Sedars*, *Kaikkollar*, *Saliars* and *Saluppars*. Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> The *Senguntar* or red dagger which indicates they might be warrior castes previously

<sup>22</sup> Ramasamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils, Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Culture*, No. 6, 104.

## 2. Permanent settlement and social structure

After the introduction of Zamindari settlement in Ramnad, the Zamindars, Talukdars, Mirasidars, ryots and all the cultivators were subject to the government of Fort St. George.<sup>23</sup> Initially during the period of the nineteenth century (Company rule) the society was divided into four categories. The social structure consisted of firstly the Europeans; secondly the Brahmins who served as priests as well as clerks and assistants playing a dual role in the society and thirdly, high caste Hindus (Zamindars, mirasidars and traders). They mostly belonged to Vellalan and Telugu communities. The fourth class of people were common or landless labourers.<sup>24</sup> The impact of the permanent settlement made way for the new social structure based on the ownership of land. The Zamindars were owners or proprietors of the entire land and leased land to mirasidars (mostly Vellalans, Reddies, Maravans and Rajus) for cultivation to get a regular rent. The new landholders or mirasidars kept some fertile portions which might be cultivated with *pannayal* and *padiyal*. Vellalans rarely cultivated their lands, mostly hiring labour for cultivating the land from *pannayal* or *padiyal* who were from Pallan and Paraiyan castes.<sup>25</sup> Mirasidars paid in kind and cloths and rarely cash to agricultural labourers or *pannayal* and *padiyal*. Vellalans assumed that Maravans, Reddies, Agambadians and other castes were just below them. The earlier setup of the social structure or social stratification in the Tamil society changed after the introduction of the permanent settlement.

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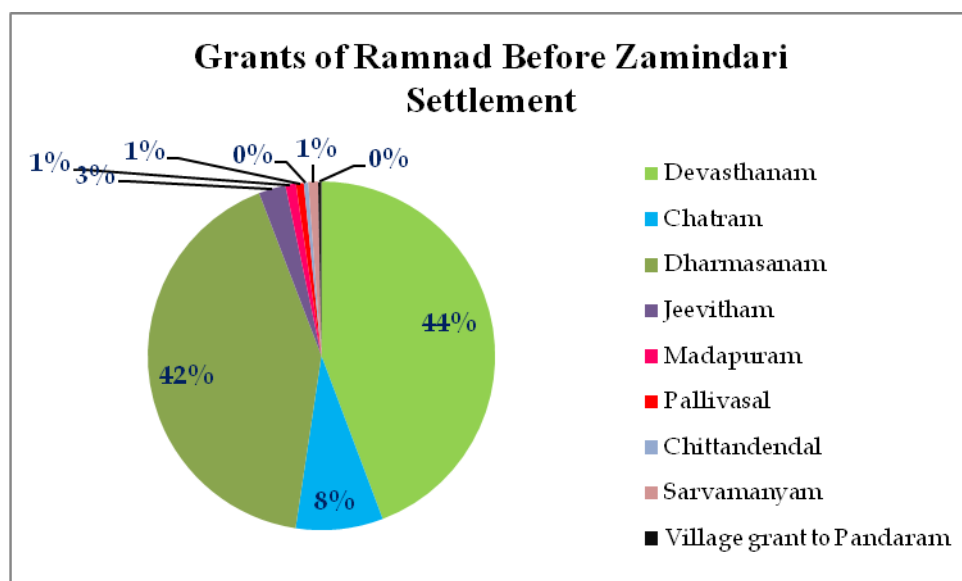
<sup>23</sup> Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector dated on 05.02.1882, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu: A Real History*, 340.

<sup>25</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 29; W. Francis, *Madura Gazetteer*, 137-138.

### 3. Land rights and new social division

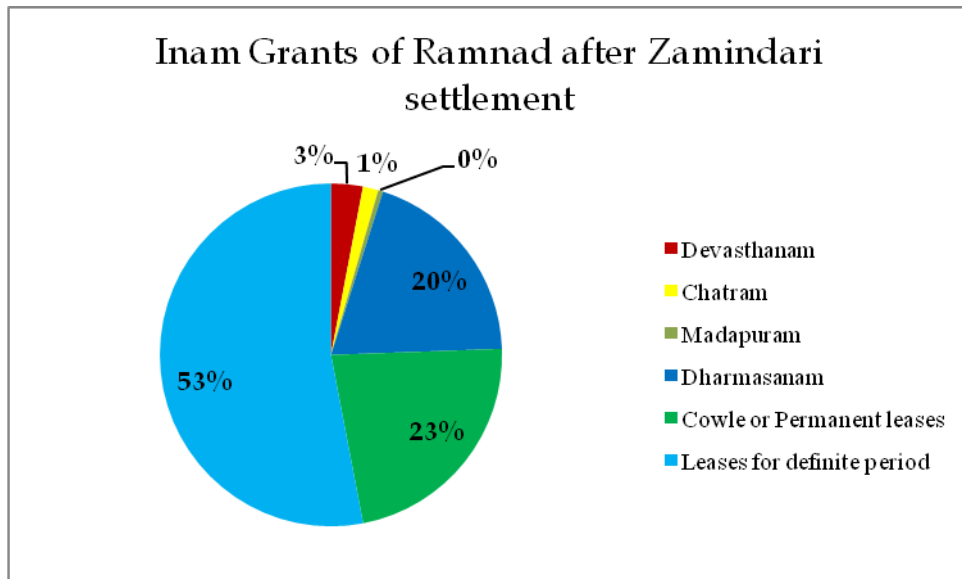
Before the permanent settlement, Ramnad Kingdom had land rights like *inam* or tax-free land grant for *dharmasanam*<sup>26</sup>, *devasthanam*, *chatram*, *madapuram* and *jivitham*. *Jivitham inam* was gifted as reward for military services. The *maniyam* and *umbalam* lands were granted for personal or public service, village temple rituals and for maintaining irrigation tanks. Later the lands were gifted for distributing tank or river water to agricultural field, labour cost for tank repair and tank digging. Post-permanent settlement, the Company allowed land grants for *dharmasanam*, *devasthanam*, *chatram* and *maniyam* and stopped the grants of *madapuram* and *jivitham*.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>26</sup> Donated lands for Brahamins

<sup>27</sup> *History of land revenue settlement and abolition of intermediary tenures in Tamil Nadu* (Madras: Tamil Nadu Archives, 1977), 22,24.





Source: T.Raja Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 1891, pp.475-477

The British appointed and redesignated the poligars as Zamindar without political power. The Zamindars were mostly former chiefs, holding territories allotted to them and paying tribute and military service to the government; a revenue officer was there in position of the Zamindar. Ramnad Zamindari had followed land tenure of *pannai* (under the control of Mirasidars), *inams* (under granted land holder or *inamdars*) and *ijara*<sup>28</sup> or lease by revenue farming. The tenants had to pay *varam* or rent to Zamindars; they paid in kind for the *nanjai* land and money for the *punjai* land. Mirasidars had rights over *pannai* land, which were leased to them by the Zamindar. Inamdars had rights over Inam lands. Zamindars and inamdars had rights to lease their lands to anyone, collected ‘*samibhogam*’ and ‘*thunduvaram*’ rent from leaseholders whereas the tenants were demanded to pay the *melvaram* or landlord’s share to Zamindars.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Ijara* means a farm or a contract. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 284-285.

During the initial period of the Colonial rule, the British were confused and tried to understand the traditional ownership or *mirasi* rights<sup>30</sup> over the land. The Company refused to follow the traditional ownership right and did not follow land registration. The British administration transformed the Zamindar from land holder to owners of land and made agreement with ryots on contract basis and collected rent from them. Thus the British established land ownership devoid of political power. According to S. Srinivasa Ragavaiyengar, *one-fourth* of the total agricultural population of the Madras Presidency were under the settlement of Zamindari in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. The Power and Influence of Zamindars**

Under the permanent settlement, the Zamindar not only acted as revenue collector but also maintained his economic and social supremacy over his estate. For maintaining the social supremacy, zamindars followed several kinds of activities to prove their name and fame. Zamindars were always eager to celebrate festivals and spent more for projecting them as superior to others. Under Zamindari tenure, the social order was constructed based on the caste system, Zamindars of Ramnad patronised and followed the caste system. For exhibiting their social prestige and economic power, the Zamindars spent more amounts for installation ceremony, palace functions and funeral rituals.<sup>32</sup> Zamindars always wanted to maintain their social honour or *mariyathai* in the social order which led them to get special status or

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<sup>30</sup> The traditional right of land ownership was concern as 'those who cleared the bushes or cultivate the crops, or paid tax they were the owner of the land'. King or ruler could not involve their right or could not oppose their right over the land. If ruler wanted the land means had to buy the land through paying price for that.

<sup>31</sup> Srinivasa Ragavaiyengar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 218, 222.

<sup>32</sup> B.S.Ward, *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Provinces of Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. III (Madurai: 1895), 104. Cited in Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 128-137.

*antastu*.<sup>33</sup> The celebration of festivals was one of the major ways for projecting the raja's image and showing off the zamindars' economic and social influence to the people and other neighbouring domains. The celebration of Navaratri or 'festival of nine nights,' was celebrated only in the Madura country by the Nayaks of Madura. During the reign of Rangunatha Setupathi @ Tirumalai Setupathi (1647-72), Tirumalai Nayak of Madura country gave him privilege to celebrate the Navaratri festival in the Ramnad kingdom as a favour in return for protecting Tirumalai Nayak from the attack of the Mysore army in 1659. Further Tirumalai Nayak, bestowed on Rangunatha Setupathi the title Tirumalai Setupathi for commemorating his military assistance. Additionally, Tirumalai Nayak presented the Durgapidam or the altar of the goddess Durga to Rangunathan@ Thirumalai Setupathi<sup>34</sup> Thus the Setupathi received a higher status above all the other poligars.

Zamindars of Ramnad yearly celebrated the *Navaratri* festival or festival in honour of goddess Durga for Navarathiri or 'nine nights'. Before conducting the celebration of *Navaratri*, Raja of Ramnad used to organise and participate in the celebration of Kali and Ayyanar temple festivals in Ramnad.<sup>35</sup> Both Navaratri and Pongal, a harvesting festival, were celebrated in the "raja sabai" or royal durbar of Ramalinga Vilasam, palace of the Setupathi. During the festivals of Navaratri and Pongal there was a special meeting held by the zamindar with the head of the temple, zamindars' officials and Brahmins. These official and others were offered fruits, cloths and sheep to Raja of Ramnad based on their economic status. Ramalinga Vilasam was the main palace where Raja of Ramnad announced the royal gifts, information to the public and officials. During the durbar the place was used to offer

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<sup>33</sup> *Antastu* is a Sanskrit word which derived from *antahstha* means being in the mid or between. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 219.

<sup>35</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 135-144.

food, *prasadam* and coconut.<sup>36</sup> According to *Ramnad Manual*, the Raja of Ramnad's power and prestige could be assessed by the court practices and etiquette during the eighteenth century. The Tondaiman Raja of Pudukkottai, Raja of Sivaganga and the Chief of Tanjore territory must stand before him, with palms of their hands joined together and stretched out towards the presence of Raja of Ramnad. The Poligar of Panjalankurichi Kattabommu and the Tottians were considered as inferior to the Raja of Ramnad and they should prostrate themselves in full length before the Setupathi and after rising must stand not be seated until Raja of Ramnad seated.<sup>37</sup>

The Setupathi Rajas spent lavishly for maintaining their honour and prestige and carried out philanthropical and welfare measures befitting their social status. They also donated to temples and received the *mariyathai* in the temple rituals by way of maintaining their high status in the ritual hierarchical order. Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-1873) spent plenty of amounts for the marriage function of his son Baskarasami Setupathi. Baskara Setupathi (1889-1903) spent rupees two lakhs for the renovation of the temple of Thiruuthirakosamangai, Thiruvadanaï and Thiruchuli. Baskarasami Setupathi was an enlightened scholar who was interested in studies of Tamil language and literature and patronised Tamil scholars. He supported Pandithurai Tevar to form the Fourth Sangam for Tamil at Madurai. The first three Sangams were supported by the Pandya Chiftains of ancient Tamil region and the fourth Sangam was an attempt at reviving the glory of the Tamil language and the Pandya rule. Baskarasami Setupathi initiated and built the Setupathi High School at Madurai.<sup>38</sup> Among the Ramnad Zamindars, Baskarasami Setupathi maintained good relationship between public and *samasthanam* owing to his welfare activities. He was the only person who had western education among other zamindars. He was willing

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<sup>36</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 151.

<sup>37</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Kamal, *Mannar Baskara Setupathi*, 25-30.

to donate the land and money for patronising poets, establishing schools and other such charitable activities. He donated forty thousand rupees towards constructing a hostel for Madras Christian College, Thambaram where he had studied. He also donated money for constructing *chatrams* in and around the Rameswaram temple for the visit of pilgrims and opened schools for marginalised students. The zamindars of Ramnad were mostly concentrated to maintain their status as rulers of *vis-a-vis* their reduced political status and limited authority.<sup>39</sup>

Zamindars of Ramnad performed as *dharmakarthis* or trustees of temples in the entire estate. They had received *muthal mariyatai* or *parivattam* in the Rameswaram temple and other temples of the zamindari. The celebration of festivals in a grand manner was utilised to show the status of the Zamindar. After the introduction of the permanent settlement the zamindars were transformed as land owners. The proprietary right over land and the consequent authority to collect revenue made him claim supreme status in the social order. Zamindars, owing to the owning of the lands, wanted to maintain his power and authority over the entire social structure of his domain. Apart from the revenue collector, Zamindars played a major role in the construction of the social hierarchical order based on land owning and holding. Thus zamindars maintained their social supremacy declared themselves as 'Raja' and 'Maharaja' to project their honour and status.<sup>40</sup> Zamindars were paying more attention towards hunting and it was their main pastime activity. Plenty of wild animals like tiger, porcupine, antelopes and other animals attracted them to hunting. British Collectors and higher officials were involved in hunting trips along with the Zamindars. They used guns also when they made trip on hunting. Zamindars were

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<sup>39</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Revenue Department, G.O.No. 3933, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1910. Cited in Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 129.

crazy about the purchase of hunting and high bred dogs.<sup>41</sup> These hunting trips were organised to facilitate the good will of the British officials. The knowledge of guns and the possession of hunting dogs were efforts to show off their status to the British officials in a scenario where such technological know-how and scientific knowledge were markers of status and superiority.

## **5. Zamindars, Karnams and Mirasidars in the Agrarian Structure**

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, Zamindars leased pannai lands to tenants for cultivation who were called Mirasidar who kept some part of land for their own cultivation with the help of *pannayaal* and *padiyal*; the rest of the land was leased to sub-tenants. In 1815, the Company began an investigation on the *mirasi* right. Subsequently cultivators were permitted to sell or transfer the land. In this case, some of the Zamindars and their managers also bought land from cultivators and utilised the ryot's land known as *siruthettu*<sup>42</sup> (private or individual) lands.<sup>43</sup> In 1820, the Board of Revenue reported that the Zamindar did not have rights to drive out the ryot from his land, unless he was denied the rent. The Zamindar was prohibited from collecting rent exceeding the amount fixed by the British Government. If he demanded more, the ryot had rights to appeal his case to the civil court. But in the case landless of peasants they did not have right to appeal and were left at mercy of the landlords who treated them like slaves.

According to Regulation IV of 1822, the Collector was responsible to enquire into disputes between Zamindars and ryots regarding assessment of land rents. Without getting permission from the Collector, the Zamindar had no power to expel

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<sup>41</sup> *Survey Report of Madurai and Dindigl Provinces*, 17 December 1817, M.C.R. Vol. 9083, 77-79. Cited in Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 131-132.

<sup>42</sup> Ryot had right to sell their rights of land to others such a land was purchased by Zamindar or Manager of the estate which property of land was known as *siruthettu*

<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, 8, 219.

the ryot from his land.<sup>44</sup> The Zamindar's main duty was to maintain and repair the irrigation sources. Instead, he had leased villages to mirasidars and demanded them to maintain them. By leasing the village, with tanks to certain individual persons for a favourable price called *cowls* or *kavul*, the Zamindar thought of getting more revenue from the leases. This land's *melvaram* share was collected as cash. In 1870, 226 villages were leased under the terms of *cowls* in the Ramnad Zamindari when Ponnusami Tevar was the Manager of Ramnad.<sup>45</sup> According to the *Ramnad Manual* 335 villages were *cowle* village. These leases or *cowls* were made with royal family members, charitable institutions and Nattukotai Chetties bankers, (for the purpose of large loans to Zamindar) for the luxurious life-style of the Zamindars. The lease (*cowls*) holders named *cowledar*, assumed autonomous power control over the *cowel* villages.<sup>46</sup> Apart from self-governing power, the *cowledar* had to pay road tax and other tax as to Zamindars. The lease of villages was transformed into an agrarian institution in the mid nineteenth century when the Zamindar became a hollow authority or powerless ruler in the political order. The landholders who obtained gifts and leases, namely *Inamdars* and *Cowledars*, refused to obey the Zamindar, leading to the decline of the power of the Setupathis of Ramnad.<sup>47</sup> The Zamindar of Ramnad failed to integrate new land owning groups who maintained supreme power in their locality.

Ramnad Zamindari's *karnam* was the responsible person to assess and fix the land rent on each *pattadar*. Zamindars also manipulated the accounts with the help of *karnams*. The *karnam* was deficient in knowledge, un-trained in land surveys and lacked the ability to prepare field map of their villages to assess the land for rent. The

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<sup>44</sup> *Proceedings of Board of Revenue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1864, No. 7843.

<sup>45</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 99-101.

<sup>46</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 477.

<sup>47</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 99-101.

*karnam*'s service and duties were not satisfactory to the British Government. Their land assessment and fixing the rate was not proper; ultimately cultivators suffered to pay the land rent. Sometimes, Zamindars delayed and denied to issue *pattas* to ryots and collected land rent from ryots from unsettled lands also.<sup>48</sup> The illiterate ryots were not aware of the procedures for receiving the *pattas* and officials' assessment of the land rent. The manipulation and mismanagement of the Zamindars were the major causes for the critical situation of the ryots in the Ramnad Zamindari.

The recipients of donated lands or *inamdars* were mostly wealthy Brahmins and other higher castes *Mirasidars* were mostly from among Vellalans, Maravans and other wealthy social groups of Ramnad. The landlords who had joint villages under them were called *kaniyatchikaran* in the Madras Presidency. Elis notes that those who had right over the land *kaniyatchi* been termed *mirasi* and holding of the *mirasi* rights made them *mirasidars*. The entire village land came under their control. Bayley opines that the *mirasi* rights were only practised in Tanjore district; but Lionel Place argues that *mirasi* rights existed in Chinglepet and was extended to other parts like North Arcot, South Arcot, Tinnevely and some parts of Madras, Dindugul and Trichinopoly.<sup>49</sup> The sub tenants under the mirasidars employed cultivators known as the *payakarīs* to cultivate the land. *Payakarīs*<sup>50</sup> were paid certain fees by *mirasidars* called 'swastiyam'.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the tenant cultivated his land with his family members. For more work he made with the help of others, called *pannayals*. He was paid wages in two ways; firstly, monthly grains fee of 20 to 40 measure of *maize* or *ragi*, and annual cash allowance from rupees two to five; secondly, the monthly

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<sup>48</sup> Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> *Papers on Mirasi Rights* (Madras: Athenaeum Press, 1862)

<sup>50</sup> According to H.H.Wilson *Payacarry*, a temporary cultivator, one who cultivates the land of another for a stipulated term and a given share of the crop. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 413.

<sup>51</sup> Saratha Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850*, 31-34.



payment of cash of Rs two and half to four was also practised in the *mirasi* tenure.<sup>52</sup> The agricultural labourers mostly belonged to the lowest class of people or economically backward people such as Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans.

## 6. Problems and Issues of Peasants

### 6.1. Litigation and Administrative Issues

The condition of the Ramnad Zamindari ryot was not so good due to environmental, climatic and administrative issues. Due to this there were numerous litigations on the Ramnad Zamindars who lost plenty of amounts on the cases. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Ramnad Zamindars were keenly interested in the occupying the position of Zamindars of Ramnad. Therefore the Zamin or royal family members fought and filed suits for the authority of Ramnad Zamin. Thus, rulers of Ramnad did not have time and interest for agriculture. After the permanent settlement, agreement between Rani Mangaleswari Nachiyar and the Company (1803), Ramnad faced different kinds of financial issues with the increase of *peshcush* amount and litigations on getting power over Ramnad Zamindari. The Ramnad Zamindars faced several litigation issues from 1807 to 1873. *Ramnad Manual* says that all the Zamindars of Ramnad were seriously involved in suits for attaining power and maintaining the Zamindarship. Huge amounts were spent to succeed in litigations. The estate was also suffered because of the mismanagement of the managers and heavy dept of the *marava* rulers.<sup>53</sup>

Rani Mangaleswari Nachiyar passed away on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1807 and her adopted son Annasami Tevar<sup>54</sup> became the ruler of Ramnad under the title Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Setupathi. But as he was a minor, *Pradani* Thiagaraja Pillai acted as the

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<sup>52</sup> *Proceedings of Board of Revenue*, dated on 11.11.1872, No. 2179.

<sup>53</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 346.

<sup>54</sup> In 1804 Mangaleswari Nachiyar adopted Annasami as heir

regent for ruler. However, Sivagami Nachiyar, daughter of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I, filed a suit against Annasami Tevar and claimed herself as the Zamindarini of Ramnad. Therefore Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Setupathi @ Annasami Tevar had to spend expensively on litigations from 1807-1820. The lower courts decided in her favour in 1815 and she was enjoying the Zamindari for one full year. However she failed to pay the revenue and the *peshcush* fell into arrears. Therefore the estate was placed under the management of the Court of Sadr Adalat for a period of fourteen years as her behalf.<sup>55</sup>

In the meantime, Muthu Vijay Ragunatha Setupathi passed away in 1820. His adopted son Ramasami Tevar<sup>56</sup> and his widowed wife, Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar stated claims to the Zamindari of Ramnad. On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1829, the Court of Sadr Adalat handed over the Ramnad estate to Ramasami Tevar. Ragunatha's widow was endowed with receiving the special privileges and honour of the Rameswaram temple for withdrawing the case. After the death of Ramasami, Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar and his brother Muthu Chella Tevar managed the Ramnad estate on behalf of Ramasami Setupathi's daughter Mangaleswari Nachiyar. Owing to the mismanagement of Muthu Chella Tevar, the estate came under the control of the Court of Wards. Once again Sivagami Nachiyar, daughter of Muthuramalinga Setupathi filed a suit this time against Mangaleswari Nachiyar for claiming Ramnad Zamindarship. This suit was heard in the London Privy Council. In 1846 the Company decided and recognised Ramasami Tevar's widow Parvata Vardhani as the Zamindarini of Ramnad. She too faced plenty of suits for Zamindarship during her reign. Already in 1843 Muthu

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<sup>55</sup> *Board of Revenue*, dated 21.12.1882, No. 3198,10-11.

<sup>56</sup> He was the brother of Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar wife of Vijaya Ragunatha Setupathi. Ramasami Setupathi's wife Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar and two daughters named Mangaleswari Nachiyar and Durairaja Nachiyar

Veerayi Nachiyar<sup>57</sup> had filed a suit against Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar<sup>58</sup> but it did not run its course in the courts. On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1847 it was withdrawn by Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar, who made a compromise with Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar. As a result, Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar agreed to grant twenty three villages to her for resolving the litigation issues.<sup>59</sup> Finally she overcame all the issues and ruled Ramnad with the support of her manager Kottasami Tevar, for sixteen years from 1846 to 1862. On 24<sup>th</sup> May 1857, Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar adopted her sister's son Muthu Ramalinga Sethuapathi II as heir of Ramnad Zamindari. But the Company opposed the adoption of Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar. Therefore she filed a case in Madura and Madras courts for her adoption. Finally, London Privy Council approved him as Ramnad Setupathi. Muthuramalinga Setupathi II ruled Ramnad with the support of *Pradani* Muthurulappa Pillai and with his brother Ponnusami Tevar.<sup>60</sup>

Zamindars got more income from land revenue and they spent large amounts on their personal luxuries of life, travel, sports, grants and on celebrating festivals and functions. These kinds of unwanted and excess expenses accumulated the Zamindars' arrears to the government. As a consequence, the Zamindars had to borrow more from private money lenders or Nattukottai Chetties and loans from the Government. In due course, Zamindars' could not settle their debts. Suits were filed against the Zamindars by private money lenders; especially Nattukottai Chetties filed cases against the Zamindars. The creditors to Zamindars demanded them to clear the dues. Litigation also played a major role in the decline of the Estate. The number of suits paved the way for heavier debts in Ramnad Zamin which collapsed under financial burden during the second half the nineteenth century. Thus Zamindars could not focus on the

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<sup>57</sup> Adoptive mother of Ramasami Setupathi

<sup>58</sup> Adoptive mother of Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-1873)

<sup>59</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 484.

<sup>60</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 49.

administration, irrigation or cultivation. The British government and officials gave more attention to get more income from land. The heavy debt and mismanagement of the estate managers before the 1860s crumpled the economy of the estate and therefore Zamindars demanded more rent to increase the revenue. Nelson's views about the status of Ramnad country in 1868 is that "At the present moment Ramnad appears to be in a semi-ruinous state. The tanks are breached, there are no roads worthy of the name in any part of it, cultivation is steadily decreasing the zamindari is heavily in arrears."<sup>61</sup>

During the rule of Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-1873) he had accrued debts of about thirteen lakh rupees. He applied to the Collector on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1869 to centralise his estate, and asked Government to help in this circumstance. After the Lee Warner<sup>62</sup> report, the government decided to pay an advance loan to the Zamindar to maintain of the estate and clear the arrears.

After Ramnad was taken over by the Court of Wards in 1873 with proper and strict administration, litigations gradually decreased. When the Court of Wards took over Ramnad had faced about 3,848 litigation cases, while in the year of 1888 the total number of suit was reduced to 266.<sup>63</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> January 1876, the Government granted a loan of Rs 12,72,830 to secure the estate for the great amount of debt of early Zamindars or Muthuramalinga Setupathi II's debt when the Court of Wards took charge over the administration of Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>64</sup> Again on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1878, the Government granted a loan of Rs 1,50,000 for improving the irrigation sources of the estate. Thus totally Rs 14,22,830 had been borrowed from the British

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<sup>61</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 347, 348.

<sup>62</sup> Lee Warner in charge of the estate for the five years from March 1873 to 1878 and in charge of this estate for two and half years till august 1880.

<sup>63</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 497.

<sup>64</sup> This grant amount was made through the mortgage bond was executed by H.W. Bliss, Assistant Collector of Madura and agent of Court of wards and Edward Turner, Manager of the Court of Wards.

government. Along with this amount, the annual *peshcush* Rs 2,55,000 for 1879 increased the loan amount. At the end of the nineteenth century the Zamindari of Ramnad had to repay Rs 16,77,830 to the British Government.<sup>65</sup>

In 1879, the arrear of revenues rose to Rs. 14,42,830. In this situation the Government realised that maintaining the European officers was too costly and decided to appoint Indian officers to maintain the administrative service with lower cost. Accordingly, Raja Ram Rao was appointed manager of the Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>66</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century Zamin of Ramnad met a critical situation heavy debt, famine and flood decreased land revenue. The Zamindars could not clear the annual *peshcush* and extended the arrear amount for further years. The economical imbalances increased the arrears of the *peshcush*. For settling the arrears Ramnad Zamindars were pushed to sell private property. The Zamindar's private property was also sold for the arrears of *peshcush*. But even that sale of private property could not solve the arrear problem fully. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the arrears increased. From 1881 to 1887 the total arrears of the tribute was Rs 25,84,892 which was cleared in 1888 under the management of the Court of Wards.<sup>67</sup> Ramnad *Diwan*, Rao Bagadur Venkatta Ragavaiyar, (1899 to 1923) leased the Ramnad Zamin to Devakotai Chettiars Ramasami and Lakshmana Chettiar for twenty five years. This agreement was entered on September 28, 1899 in the Madura register vol 407 in pages 1 to 27.<sup>68</sup>

This large amount of debt was to great burden to Ramnad Zamindars to administer the estate, or lead the maintenance and repair works of irrigation sources. The following table shows the arrears of Ramnad Zamindari from 1869 to 1880.

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from E.Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, dated 12.10.1887,5; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 349-350.

<sup>66</sup> Ramasamy, *TamilNadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 103-105.

<sup>67</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 498-500.

<sup>68</sup> *Ramanathapuram Samasthanam Records*, National Archives Branch, Lawspet, Puducherry.

Sl. No.	Years	Amount of Arrears		
		Rs	A	P
1	1869 to 1875	69,972	8	10
2	1876	39,143	5	10
3	1877	40,027	13	0
4	1878	48,624	2	4
5	1879	59,094	7	5
6	1880	2,41,467	5	6

Source: *Proceeding of Court of Wards* No. 1815, dated 23.06.1883, p.10

The above statistical data shows that Ramnad Zamindars maintained their arrears of annual *peshcush*, and could not look forward to improving irrigation sources and rectifying the arrears. The British government and officials gave more attention to get more income from land. In the second half of the nineteenth century the arrear amount increased. From 1881 to 1887 the total arrears of the tribute was Rs 25,84,892 which was cleared in 1888.<sup>69</sup>

According Nelson, the Ramnad rulers had ruled the country in a hopeless way. There were no irrigation or tanks repairs. There was no proper revenue settlement and they used their income on luxurious expenses. There were no systematic accounts or receipts maintained in Ramnad Zamindari. Lakhs of rupees were shown in unadjusted amounts without proper records. Most of the amount was not brought to the Zamindari accounts. The income and expenditure of the *Devasthanam*, *Dharmamagamai* accounts were not clearly maintained and the some temple accounts were also missing. The estate was in a stage of mess, dispirited and revenue decreased.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 498-500.

<sup>70</sup> J.H. Nelson's *Letter to Secretary to the Madras Government* dated on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1871, No. 1043.

## 6.2. Burden and Punishment on Peasants

The Zamindars modified the land tax from time to time at their own will without concern about the conditions of the ryots. They controlled and exploited the ryots through increasing the land rent. There was no concern about the maintenance of irrigation source. The *patta* regulation was imposed on Zamindars to do whatever they wanted to do on ryots to collect rents; at the beginning stage the government did not interfere between Zamindars and ryots. The Zamindars imposed on ryots the cultivation of forest lands. The Puttur village ryots of Ramnad Taluk refused to pay *varam* of *punjai* land which had been paid regularly as money. Zamindars were forced to cultivate commercial crops by the British. But it was filed as a criminal case against peasants in the sub-collector court. Finally the ryots obeyed the Zamindars' order and agreed to pay the demanded *varam*.<sup>71</sup>

According to *Ramnad Manual* the land rent was charged on the cultivated land and non-cultivated land too. In case of scarcity of rain, if paddy cultivation depended on tank irrigation, tenants had to pay half of the usual payment to the Zamindar. If tank water was used without Zamindar's permission average *nanjai varam* or tax was charged. If mirasidars cultivate the *nanjai* land for second crops they had to pay some part of full rent which was collected for first crops. If the second crop of *nanjai* was cultivated in the *punjai* land, tenants had to pay half rent of the first crops to Zamindar. Tenants' share of Zamindars *melvaram* granary was stored as *kudivaram* share and after getting receipt from *manigar*, the ryot could take his *kudivaram* or *kilvaram* share to his home. In case the tenant had taken both *melvaram* and *kudivaram* share without permission from superintendent he had to pay the highest

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<sup>71</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I, 112-113.

produce of his field. The ryot could not dig tank or well within fifty yards from the *Circar* channel or river or tank and thirty yards from the Zamindar's tanks.<sup>72</sup>

A great portion of the Ramnad Zamindari was sandy, not suitable for paddy cultivation.<sup>73</sup> The Ramnad Zamindari had unskilled government officers, who did not have experience in assessing the land; as a result, they fixed the land very high. It leads to ryot's burden on the land rent allotted to him. For example, there was over-assessment in Kuriyur village of Rajasingamangalam taluk, The Government officers calculated *punjai* land converting it into *nanjai land* for collecting more rent. It leads to suffering of the ryot in paying their allotted rent.<sup>74</sup> Commercialisation of Indian agriculture started in the beginning of the nineteenth century and it reached its zenith in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1833, commercial crops like jute were introduced in Bengal and a foreign variety of cotton was introduced in the Deccan.<sup>75</sup> In Ramnad Zamindari the British encouraged and imposed the cultivation of commercial crops; but ordinary cultivators could not cultivate commercial crops because of the high rate of the seeds. Many times they were prohibited from cultivating the betel; if ryots cultivated it the rate of the tax was doubled. The Zamindars were seriously involved in litigation for attaining the status of Zamindarship of Ramnad; hence they did not try to improve or repair irrigation sources.

Ramnad Zamindari's ryots were illiterate and could not understand the rate of the rent on the agreements. So they were cheated by *karnams* and government officials.<sup>76</sup> Ryots had rights to appeal their trouble regarding the rate of assessment to

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<sup>72</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 77, 300, 331-333.

<sup>73</sup> *Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards*, dated 12.10.1887.p.18

<sup>74</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, p.112

<sup>75</sup> N. Jeyabalan, *Economic History of India*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publication, 2008), 110.

<sup>76</sup> Srinivasa Ragavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 329.



district courts, but practically they hesitated and were denied, owing to wealth and influence. If they persisted, the result would not be favourable to them.

There was an average tax collected where tank water was used without permission from government officers. The average tax was collected for the cultivated crops.<sup>77</sup> The ryot made a contract with the proprietor for cultivating his land for certain amount for a period. That was known as *pathadappu*. In this case, the ryot was bound to pay whether he cultivated or not.<sup>78</sup> In 1865 the Madras Torture Commission reported on the various punishments given to the Ryot for rent due to Zamindars. The Torture Commission notes the different kinds of torture applied to ryots for the land rent, such as, keeping a man in the sunlight and not allowing him to take food or nature call, squeezing his crossed fingers with hands, pinches on the thighs, slaps, twisting the ears, tying in head hair with a donkey's or buffalo's tail, tying a man in a bent position and with his own cloth or rope or straw passing over his neck and under his toes. Tying or twisting a rope top to bottom and lifting them by the moustaches, searing them with hot iron, placing scratching insects on sensitive parts of body, preventing sleep, putting pepper or red chillies in the eyes were also done.<sup>79</sup> Generally these kinds of torture were mostly imposed on the lower grade ryots.

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<sup>77</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee, Part II, 123.*

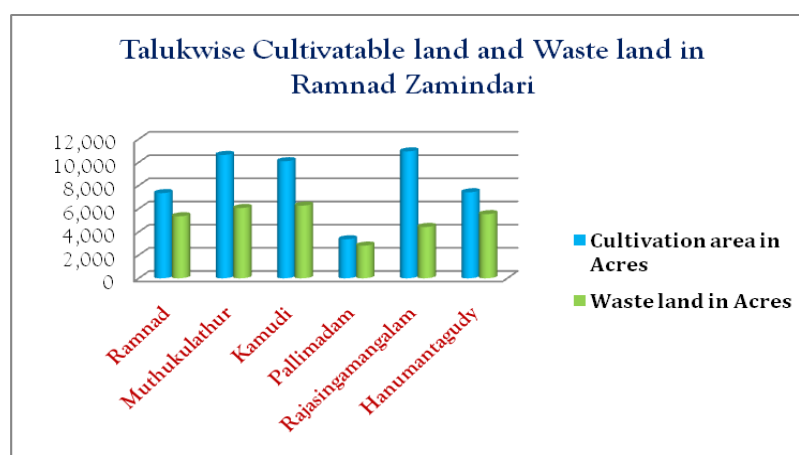
<sup>78</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements, Part I, 346.*

<sup>79</sup> *Report of the Commissioners for the investigation of alleged cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency, 1865.*

The south-west monsoon and north-east monsoon were irregular too. The river *Vaigai* was the main source irrigation for the estate but generally it almost went dry.<sup>80</sup> The following table informs us of the tanks and cultivable and waste lands of Ramnad Estate.

Sl. No	Taluks	No of Tanks	Irrigable Area in Acres.	Cultivation area in Acres.	Waste land in Acres.	Percentage at waste on irrigable area
1	Ramnad	68	12,698	7,347	5,351	42 %
2	Muthukulathur	194	16,699	10,637	6,062	36 %
3	Kamudi	334	16,366	10,095	6,271	38 %
4	Pallimadam	138	6,181	3,364	2,817	45 %
5	Rajasingamangalam	192	15,372	10,944	4,428	29 %
6	Hanumantagudi	297	12,955	7,420	5,535	43 %
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,223</b>	<b>80,271</b>	<b>49,807</b>	<b>30,464</b>	<b>38 %</b>

Source: Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 378.



According to *Ramnad Manual* there were 1,223<sup>81</sup> tanks but mostly dry due to paucity of rain. The concern of irrigation system of Ramnad Estate, they were nearly three-fifths of the wetlands were irrigated by tanks fed by rivers and forest streams and two-fifths of the wetlands depended on rains. The period between 1836 and 1875 was the most favourable season for cultivation due to the rain fall and had sufficient

<sup>80</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 78.

<sup>81</sup> According to *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* mentioned as 978 tanks. *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, 124.

water in tanks.<sup>82</sup>The *nanjai* crop of paddy cultivation on *punjai* or uncultivated land also was considered for tax. The *nanjai* land tenant had to pay rent to Zamindar whether he cultivated or not.<sup>83</sup>

The agrarian structure was commonly based on the nature of the occupation, classification depending on owning or holding of lands. In the nineteenth century, the agricultural groups were classified into three categories; on top were Landowning groups (who did not cultivate land but collected rent from land); below them were agriculturalists (who not only cultivated land but also took lands on lease); finally cultivators (who had no land, but only cultivated the lands of others).<sup>84</sup> According to M.B. Nanavathi's and J.J. Anjaria's '*Indian Rural Problem*' agricultural labourers were classified into three categories in India, such as field labourers (ploughman, reapers, sowers, weeders, transplanter and seasonable labourers), ordinary labourers (embankment workers, well diggers and cannel cleaners) and skilled labourers (carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, leather workers, artisans and not farm workers).<sup>85</sup>

The wages of the cultivators in agricultural work was commonly four to six *annas*. In case of transplanting and weeding work it was one *anna* per head per day. Sometimes the wages for weeding and transplanting was paid as grains with the rate of one and a half measures of paddy or *kambu* (sort of millet), two measures of *varagu* or *ragi* (*Paspalum frumentaceum*) or *samai* (kind of grain) or *kudiraivaly* (Horse gram).<sup>86</sup> The rates of the wages differed from male to female workers in the Mirasidar's land. In case of contract labourers the wages varied from twelve *annas* to one rupee for *punja* land and for transplanting and weeding one *anna* per head. In

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<sup>82</sup> Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector, dated 05.02.1882 No. 24.

<sup>83</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 292, 300.

<sup>84</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 509.

<sup>85</sup> M.B. Nanavati and J.J. Anjaria, *The Indian Rural Problem* (Bombay: Indian society of Agricultural Economics, 1944), 15.

<sup>86</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 77.

case of the payment as grain, one and half measures of *paddy* or *kambu* or *varagu* or *samai* or *kudiraivaly* were given for the work of weeding or transplanting. Landlords fixed the grain payment to cultivators for the work of reaping and thrashing, one *kalam* of seed land (1 acre and 18 1/8 cents) and thirty to sixty measures of grains to the labourers. The value of the grains might be Rs 1-4-0 to Rs 2-8-0 per measure. In the case of *punjai* land the payment was compensated with grains, one and half to two measure of *ragi*, or two to two and a half of measures of *varagu* or *cholam* to the cultivator.<sup>87</sup>

### 6.3. Conditions of Agricultural Labour

The Company records note that serfs or slaves existed during Muslim rule. The Muslims had practice of selling the slaves to their masters. After the onset of the Company rule too slaves continued with their masters; some of them joined military force as soldiers. The practice of slavery disappeared in second half of nineteenth century.<sup>88</sup> Dharma Kumar's work differentiates the *pannayal* and *adimai* in agricultural labour. He states that *adimai* or *slave* was transferable from land to land, but in the case of *pannayal*, they were attached to the land permanently. In Madura country slavery gradually disappeared in 1819 and after the establishment of the British rule *pallans* and *paraiyans* was released from slavery and they entered the British military force. Some of them cultivated their own lands. The census of 1841 shows that, *pallans*' and *paraiyans*' population of Madura District was sixteen percent of the total population.<sup>89</sup> The *palli*, *pallans* and *paraiyans* were the

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<sup>87</sup> Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, dated on 12.10.1887, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 25.11.1819.

<sup>89</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 41,44,52.

agricultural slaves.<sup>90</sup> According to Mr. Ellis *pallis* were slaves or serf to Brahmins, the rest of the two castes were slaves of non-Brahmin high castes especially *Vellalans* landlords.<sup>91</sup> The mirasidars had more slaves or *pannayal*, mostly *pallans*. They were forced to do work in irrigation sources and repairing work with a meagre rate of wages.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, there are no sources to prove that slavery existed in southern India. Landowning people or elite groups saw to it that ryots never became landholders or landowners and that they were always maintained as landless labourers for securing their own social supremacy. The ryots were wandering from farm to farm and district to district for getting occupation and struggled for survival. The imbalance between elite groups and cultivators led to the collapse of the entire estate. There was no specific form slavery in southern Tamil country in the nineteenth century but the *pannayals* and *padiyals* of landlords were treated like slaves or serf. The Company brought about Act of Abolition of Slavery in 1843 abolished slavery legally in India; but the agricultural labourers were treated and maintained as serfs to Zamindars or Mirasidars or whoever was dominant in the social order.

## **7. Land Regulations and Defects of Agrarian Order**

### **7.1. Need for Legislation**

The British followed two methods to collect revenue, one through Zamindars and directly through the Company's renters.<sup>93</sup> For collection of land revenue the government appointed Zamindars as revenue collectors of allotted villages. On the other hand the Zamindars used the land revenue for their own expenses and handed over the rest of the amount to the Company. The Zamindars collected tax or rent

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<sup>90</sup> *Papers on Mirasi Right*, 334-335.

<sup>91</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 58-59.

<sup>92</sup> Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, 143-144.

<sup>93</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 31.

according to their wish and need. Initially there was no fixation of land tax by the Company. The Zamindar gradually increased the land tax year by year without consulting the Company. As a consequence, for resolving the problems of ryots, the Company formed the Provincial Council to monitor the land revenue collection of Zamindars. But gradually the Provincial Council failed to do its main duties. It became pro-Zamindar and it did not scrutinise the Zamindar's methods of revenue collection. After the Provincial Council's poor response, the Board of Directors decided to appoint a special commission known as '*Circuit Committee*'.<sup>94</sup> This committee also failed to achieve much in the issue of revenue collection. This committee ignored the relationship between Zamindar and peasants. Finally, the Court of Directors abolished the Provincial Council and the *Circuit Committee* and appointed Collectors to control the Zamindari areas and a Board of Revenue was formed for supervising all the Collectors.<sup>95</sup> This circumstance created the need to initiate land regulation to regulate the Zamindars and their officers related to revenue collection.

## **7.2. Regulations of 1802**

The regulation of XXVII and XXVIII of 1802 enacted for regulating the collection of *peshcush* by Zamindar from the peasants. The government fixed *peshcush* permanently and called Zamindar *Sunnud-i-Milkiat-Istimrar* which means 'deed or grant of perpetual ownership'. Under the regulation of 1802 the rate of tax was fixed at *two-thirds* of the total produce and the Zamindar could lease the villages

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<sup>94</sup> Circuit Committee was appointed in 1775-76, this committee was appointed for investigate the condition of northern circars and jagir of madras presidency to introduce the permanent settlement. In 1786 committee recommended to government of madras was faced two difficulties to implement recommendation of the circuit committee. One was need of materials and information and second military forces of zamindari not controlled by Mughal or Nizam therefore company bide for some time.

<sup>95</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 32-33.

to ryots initially for ten years.<sup>96</sup> According to the Regulations of 1802, an agreement was made and *pattas* were issued to tenants or ryots and they were ordered to pay a fixed amount within six months. (Included in section 14 of XXV of 1802 and section 3 of Regulation XXX of 1802) Secondly, Zamindars had to consolidate the rent and impose a specific sum within two years from the commencement date permanent settlement. (Section 6 of Regulation XXX of 1802) Thirdly, the Zamindar was not allowed to impose new cess and tax on ryots under any circumstance. (Section 7 of Regulation XXX of 1802) Fourthly, section 9 of Regulations XXX of 1802 notified the dispute between Zamindars and ryots regarding assessment of rent. The Zamindar had authority to recover rent from ryots as mentioned in section 2, 3 and 4 of Regulation 28 of 1802. According to section 29 of Regulation XVIII of 1802, the Zamindar was banned to give corporal punishment to Ryots on recovering rent. It was considered as offence by this section and the ryots had rights to appeal to the court. The Regulation XXX of 1802 ordered that the Zamindar had no right to impose or fix rent or tax according to their convenience or the ryots' status. The recommendation of the Board of Revenue, as per the regulation IV of 1802 was that on any dispute between Zamindars and Ryots, the Collector was to enquire and submit the report to the government regarding the rent issue. And these regulations stipulated that until getting sanction from the Collector, the Zamindar should not sell or attach the property of the ryot who refused to pay land rent. The Zamindar had no right to send off the ryot without notifying the Collector.<sup>97</sup> The Zamindar had rights to expel the ryot who failed or refused to accept the *patta* or rent of the land and the Zamindar could hand over the *patta* to another ryot. (Section 10 of regulation XXX of 1802) If the ryot defaulted to payment of rent the Zamindar had right to sue him in a court to

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<sup>96</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I*, 11, 32.

<sup>97</sup> Srinivasa Ragavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 227-231.

sell the land or transfer the tenancy rights to another ryot. (Regulation 28 of 1802 section 34 clauses 7) Section XIV of regulation of 1802 was more favourable to ryots. It said that landholders or Zamindars were responsible to grant *patta* to ryot with the right over the land and rent payable to Zamindar.<sup>98</sup>

The revenue administration of the Zamindari was supervised by a *diwan* or manager. He had assistants like *karnams*, *nattanmakarans* and *kavalkars*<sup>99</sup> in all the villages to collect land revenue from each village.<sup>100</sup> According to the regulation of Zamindari settlement, landholder or Zamindars were required to issue *pattas* to ryots and receive agreements duly accepted by ryots called *muchilikkas*. The *karnam* prepared *pattas* which comprise the description of the property, terms of holding, payable rent and duration of the tenures. It entered in the tax register called *variyeedu* (tax book). These *pattas* and *muchilikkas* must be registered by the *karnams* who were known as *pattadars*. The *nattanmakarans* was responsible to settle the collected amount to Zamindars treasury and mention the *thandals* (receipts) date and amount collected from *pattadars*. *Nattanmakarans* prepared acknowledgement receipt and handed over one copy to *pattadars* and the other copy to the Zamin's office.<sup>101</sup>

The Mirasidars's main duty was to consolidate his demand into one sum of money or grain; he could not demand more money or grain than what was mentioned in the deed. If the Mirasidars demanded more than the amount found in the deed, ryots had right to file suits against the Mirasidars. The Landlord or Mirasidar had to issue receipt for the money or grain from the ryots. Every year, the *pattas* and *muchilikkas* were exchangeable to other ryots. Power had been given to civil courts to

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<sup>98</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 63.

<sup>99</sup> *Karnam*, *nattanmakarans* and *kavalkar* received land grant as remuneration for their services.

<sup>100</sup> *Estate Land Act Committee Landholders' Statements*, Part III, 373-374.

<sup>101</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 65.



solve the disputes between the Mirasidars and the ryots.<sup>102</sup> Hodgson states about the regulation of Zamindari settlement that “the first principle of the permanent settlement was to confirm and secure these rights” and that “the proprietary right of the Zamindars was no more than the right to collect from the cultivators that rent which custom has established as the right of Government....”<sup>103</sup>

The *patta* and *karnam* regulations were issued to protect the ryot but they failed to work for the ryot; they were ‘almost dead letter’ regulations.<sup>104</sup> The *patta* and *karnam* regulations officially protected the ryot from the tyranny of landholders but practically peasants suffered because of Mirasidars. Thus circumstances arose to enact one more regulation after two decades.

### **7.3. Rent Regulation of 1822**

The land regulations and *patta* and *karnam* regulations created several confusions giving rise to an increasing numbers of suits between ryots and Zamindars. For recovering or controlling these defects the Board of Directors passed regulation IV and V of 1822. Accordingly the section IV of 1802, the Government had no authority to intervene in the rights of landholders and ryots. But section five of 1822 allows the ryots to file suits, free of stamp duty, and also states that before ejecting the ryots from the land, Mirasidars should get permission from the Collectors. Regulation of 1822 did not repeal the regulation of 1802 and simply it made some amendments to it.<sup>105</sup> The regulations IV and V of 1822 were officially formed to protect the ryot from increase in the tax. The regulation of 1822 continued until 1865 and there arose a need to create an act for the Collector to recover the rent

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<sup>102</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 66.

<sup>103</sup> *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1864, No.7843

<sup>104</sup> B. Bala Parameswari, “Abolition of Zamindari System and its Impact on Agriculture,” *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2, 4, (2016): 11.

<sup>105</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 68-69.

from the tenant as renewable every year.<sup>106</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century the Board of Revenue legalised the rights of ryots, but the suppression of ryot by Zamindars was unavoidable. So the Government protected the ryots legally; but practically they were not fully secure by this legislation. Ryots had the right to appeal for his privileges to the district court but ultimately it was in vain.

#### **7.4. Madras Rent Recovery Act of 1865 and Madras Estate Land Act of 1908**

Until the Rent Recovery Act VIII of 1865 was passed, the regulation of permanent settlement of *patta* and *karnam* regulation of 1802 was followed for land revenue collection. In 1863 Rent Recovery bill was passed, and in 1865 enacted as Madras Rent Recovery Act.<sup>107</sup> The Rent Recovery Act had some strong provisions on the exchange of *pattas* and *muchilikkas*. This Act gave the power to the Collector to resolve the disputes between Mirasidars or Zamindars and ryots regarding land assessment. This Act noted that with the approval of cultivator's signature *pattas* would be valid; when the Zamindar made any illegal demand the ryot had the right to sue for damage at the chamber of the Collector. This Act was not effective in protecting the ryot from the Zamindar's oppressive measures.<sup>108</sup> Under the Rent Recovery Act VIII of 1865, there was no limitation given to Zamindars to collect arrears from ryots. According to this Act, Zamindars were authorised to take any measure or action for recovery of arrears.<sup>109</sup> If they failed to pay arrears their movable property could be captured by landholders and the land lease would be transferred to another ryot. But the act was practised ineffectively. Board of Revenue noted that rent

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<sup>106</sup> *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1864, No.7843

<sup>107</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, 223-224.

<sup>108</sup> Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 71.

<sup>109</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 466.

recovery act failed which affected the regular revenue of the British government; therefore the Board passed the Madras Estate Land Act of 1908.

The Madras Estate Land Act of 1908 was introduced by Forbes; this Act came to force on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1908. According to this act, “legal status of the Zamindar under the permanent settlement cannot be put higher than that of an assignee of the public revenue”.<sup>110</sup> The Rent Recovery Act of 1865 was repealed by Madras Estate Act of 1908. Section 6 of this act declared the occupancy right of the ryot over the soil.<sup>111</sup> The Zamindar had no rights to change the rate of land tax without getting permission from the District Collector. This Act ratified the demerits of the Rent Recovery Act of 1865.<sup>112</sup> This Act secured permanent right of occupancy to all ryots and assured the ryots of transfer of his land by sale, gift or otherwise. It prohibited landlords from dispossessing the ryot from the land, without approval by law. But in case of recovery of the arrears of rent, the Zamindar had right to file suit before the Collector and sell the ryot’s movable property and produce of crops.<sup>113</sup> The variation of the land tax followed by Zamindar was considered as illegal and punishable under the regulation of the government.<sup>114</sup>

## **8. Defects of Regulations and Revenue Suits**

The Government legalised the protection of cultivators but the intention behind these acts was to get more land revenue from them. Another cause; the Government desired to get more land revenue regularly from the ryots, though the British Government tried to protect the cultivators. So the cultivators were protected

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<sup>110</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part I, 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, 223; Chakravarthi, *Land Law in Madras Presidency*, 71,128.

<sup>112</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 279.

<sup>113</sup> Varghese Jeyaraj, *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai*,151-152.

<sup>114</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, 38.

verbally; but practically they suffered and were oppressed by the Zamindars, officers, landlords and money lending communities. Some of the ryots sued against the illegal activities of landholders and Zamindars. The several law suits of Zamindars or against zamindars were filed in the civil and revenue courts of the district.<sup>115</sup> The Madras Estate Land Act Committee Report states that debt and royal suits were the major issues and causes for the collapse of the administration of the Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>116</sup> Between 1813 and 1829 Sivagami Nachiyar, daughter of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72 & 1782-95) filed a case against Mangaleswari Nachiyar. From 1807 to 1873 a series of cases was filed against the Ramnad Zamindars. In 1873 when Ramnad was under the control of the Court of Wards, 3,848 cases were filed against the Zamindars.<sup>117</sup> The following table shows how many suits were filed in Ramnad Zamindari during the period of 1879 and 1886 against the Zamindar for occupying several villages after the implementation of the Rent Recovery Act of 1865.

Sl. No	Years	Number of suit against Ramnad Zamindars
1	1879	771
2	1880	411
3	1881	405
4	1882	288
5	1883	281
6	1884	186
7	1885	183
8	1886	170
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,695</b>

Source: *Letter from E.Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards*, 12.10.1887, 5.

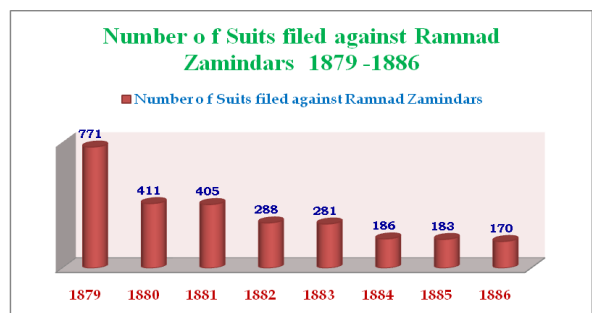
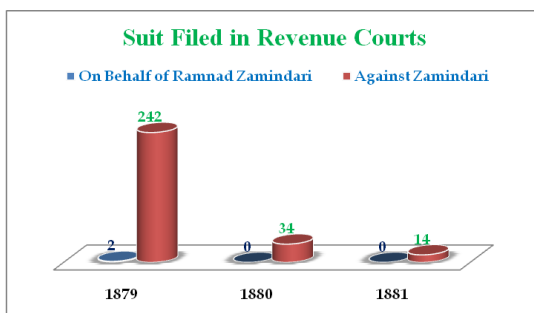
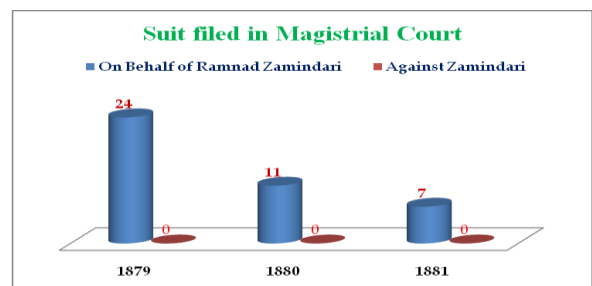
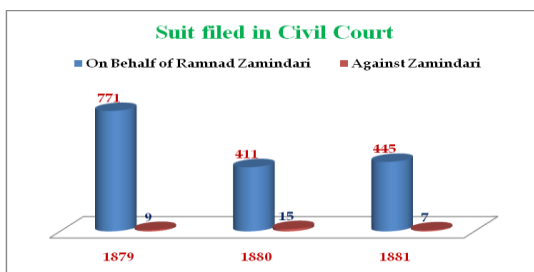
<sup>115</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 352.

<sup>116</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part II*, 115.

<sup>117</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 49; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 346, 497.

The above source shows that there was serious opposition against the occupancy of villages' in Ramnad Zamindari. The ryots could not get benefit from the regulations and Acts and peasants were suppressed, controlled by Zamindars and landlords.

Several suits were filed by Nattukottai Chetties or money-lending community of Ramnad for large sums of money borrowed and due by the Zamindars of Ramnad. The Zamindar's heavy debts and Setupathi (Baskarasami Setupathi) being a minor led to the Court of Wards taking charge of Ramnad. After the Court of Wards took over the Ramnad, gradually the total number of cases came to 266 by 1888.<sup>118</sup> It indicates that the British followed liberal actions and granted remuneration to the peasants for continuing the cultivation processes for their proper and regular revenue from the land. The following charts describes about the suit filed in civil, magisterial and revenue courts for and against Ramnad Zamindar.



Source: *Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, 12.10.1887, 5.*

<sup>118</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 497.

## 9. The Famine of 1876-78 and its Impact

The failure of monsoon led to poor wet land cultivation in the entire Zamindari and ryots became debtors. Fertile lands were under the hands of Zamindars or their relatives who used tank and river water for cultivation. Zamindars and their relations were unwilling to repair the irrigation resources and demanded the tenants to do it. The Royal kin, manager of the estate and elite groups of the estate were the full beneficiaries of royal donations in the nineteenth century in Ramnad Zamin.<sup>119</sup> Ryots' condition was generally not easy to cultivate the land that mostly depended on *sahukars* or money lenders for the payment of their land rent. They repaid the loan partly by field production and partly from their earnings by labour. River *Vaigai* was the main source of irrigation.<sup>120</sup> There were no perennial rivers in the Ramnad Zamindari and there was no shutter to sluices in tank and some of the '*kalingal*'<sup>121</sup> were badly damaged which could not be maintained or repaired by Zamindars. They tried rarely to renovate some of the larger tanks but they did not bother about the smaller tanks.<sup>122</sup>

Between 1813 and 1889, flood water of *Vaigai* river damaged the weak tanks of Ramnad Zamindari. As a result failure of crops, diseases and artificial starvation occurred during 1876 to 1878 which was called the Great Famine in the entire India. *Ambalagar* of the Karuttanyandel village of Ramnad Zamindari complained against the Zamindar that 'no one has cultivated wet land for ten years'.<sup>123</sup> The Great Famine of 1876-78 occurred and affected seriously the districts of Ganjam, Vizakapatnam,

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<sup>119</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 84.

<sup>120</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 78.

<sup>121</sup> *Kalingal* means a stone facing or embankment for keeping the water of a reservoir. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 581.

<sup>122</sup> *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part II*, 114.

<sup>123</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 99-101.

Godavari, Madura, Ramnad, Tinnevely Tanjore, Malabar and South Canara and covered 74,000 square miles and affected 30 million people of Madras Presidency. Followed by the Great Famine series of floods occurred in 1877, 1880, 1882, 1883 and 1884. It was a complete blow on agriculture production and peasants' routine life. Between 1750 and 1850 around 1,800,000 lost their lives. Again between 1875 and 1900 18 famines occurred in the Madras Presidency.<sup>124</sup>

The British government's economic policy towards agrarian order led to artificial famine and shortage of food grains. The commercialisation of agriculture was more beneficial to the Britain government. On the other hand, the inhabitants or indigenous ryots struggled for their lives. The decay or decline of the local industry was the major cause for the peasant's ill nature of life. The people of the village community had the local chieftain or Zamindars utilise and exploit them for their luxurious lifestyle. During the period of failure of monsoon and famine, ryots were exempted from paying tribute after verification. But the ryot had to pay rent as arrear with the next year payment. It was clear that the government and the Zamindars were lent on collecting the tax from the peasant. The commercialisation of agriculture, mismanagement of the Zamindars and their heavy debt, lack of maintenance of irrigation sources, malpractice of village officers and tax burden were the major causes for famine or drought of 1876-1878. It paved the way for migration of the people to neighbouring places and other countries.<sup>125</sup> In 1909, the report of the Ceylon Labour Commission stated that the total number of Tamils' migration into

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<sup>124</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 77; Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century*, 41,44,52.

<sup>125</sup> B. Bala Parameswari, "Abolition of Zamindari System and its Impact on Agriculture," *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2, 4, (2016): 11.

their country, was almost 42,000 Paraiyans, 29,000 Pallans, 18,000 Ambalagarans, 16,000 Kallans, 14,000 Vellalans, 10,000 Agambadians and 5 Brahmins also.<sup>126</sup>

## **10. Condition of Ryots under the Management of the Court of Wards**

In 1803, with the introduction of permanent settlement in Ramnad, whenever the Zamindari was in a position of insecurity of financial shortage of revenue arrears, the Company formed the Court of Wards to protect the estate on behalf of the Company. In this sense, Ramnad Zamindari was under the management of Court of Wards during 1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889.<sup>127</sup> The *Ramnad Manual* indicates that under the management of Raja of Ramnad, ryots had suffered and faced great difficulties, but, at the same time, under the control of Court of Wards ryots' difficulties and problems were resolved and importance was given to renovate the irrigation sources. The Court of Wards made easy access to government officers for approval to harvest the crops and stopped the malpractice of officers and revenue assessment and accounts were properly maintained.

The period between 1823 and 1882 Ramnad Zamindar's managers did not undertake proper maintenance of irrigation sources. In 1823, when Ramnad came under Court of Wards, manager Narayana Rao took necessary action to improve and renovate all the tanks of Ramnad Zamindari. After the takeover of Ramnad by under Court of Wards in 1873, with proper and strict administration, litigation suits gradually reduced. The Court of Wards main intension was to improve the agricultural sources to get more revenue from land. After the famine in the estate in 1876-78, the government gave importance to promote agricultural sources and was eager to spend more for improving irrigation work. In the period from 1873 to 1887

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<sup>126</sup> Joseph C. Houpert, *The Madura Mission Manual*, 5.

<sup>127</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 121.



the government spent Rs.7,36,107 for irrigation for wet land. As a result they received from land as revenue Rs. 46.20.162.<sup>128</sup>

During the period of 1882 -1883 Ramnad had sufficient rain falls, and due to that agricultural production increased.<sup>129</sup> Last two decades of the nineteenth century Ramnad had good monsoon to promote agricultural production. The Court of Wards followed regular and strict methods to collect regular revenue from ryots and collected rent at a favourable price. Between 1881 and 1887 Court of Wards got the arrear amount and interest Rs. 25, 84,892. Ramnad Zamin paid off entire arrears of *peshcush* by October 1889.<sup>130</sup> The conditions of the ryots improved in the beginning of twentieth century. The government passed Madras Estates Land Act of 1908 which provided the ryots with occupation rights over the land and initiated protection of ryots from the suppression of Zamindars. It might be considered the better Act than the previous Acts.<sup>131</sup>

## 11. Overview

Before the Zamindari settlement the local chieftain played as sovereign ruler over his kingdom. The ruler of the kingdom was ultimate one who had maintained political, economic and social legitimacy over his territory. The Vellalans, Reddies and Maravans had supreme positions in the social order. On the other hand Shanans were placed in the second stage. They considered themselves superior to Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. The Maravans were considered higher than Kallans and Agambadians. Later these three communities together were called *Mukkulathor* in the twentieth century. Agambadians served as servants in the Zamindar's palace and

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<sup>128</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 380,425, 497.

<sup>129</sup> *Letter from C.S Crole to Secretary to Court of Wards*, 23.06.1883.

<sup>130</sup> *Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards*, 12.10.1887, 5.

<sup>131</sup> B. Bala Parameswari, "Abolition of Zamindari System and its Impact on Agriculture," *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2, 4, (2016): 11.

Kallans served as soldiers and part of them were entertained in agricultural activities. The Rajus communities worked in the guardian of queen's quarters of Ramnad Zamindars.

The earlier social structure changed after the introduction of the permanent settlement in Ramnad. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the great changes of political and social stratification of southern Tamil country owing to the British economic policy. In 1802 the entire southern Tamil country came under the direct control of the Company and converted the assigned poligars into Zamindars or landlords of their respective *palayams*, and *palayams* changed into Zamindari. The local chieftains were redesignated as Zamindars without any military force or political power. The introduction of Zamindari tenure in 1803 created a new social ladder in Ramnad. The British government had the top place in the ladder and Zamindars were in the second place and thirdly Mirasidars or tenants, fourthly peasants or sub tenants and lastly landless and marginalised labourers. After the implementation of the permanent settlement, Zamindars were considered landowner. Zamindars leased land to mirasidars for certain periods and collected fixed rent for the land.

Zamindars followed different methods of assessment while collecting rent from *nanjai* and *punjai* lands. They appointed *karnams* and other officers to collect land revenue from mirasidars and ryots. The British government, Zamindars and Mirasidars were keenly interested to collect more income from the land. Therefore they used rigid methods to collect the share of the produce from the peasants. The peasants and landless labourers always struggled to survive from the suppression of Zamindars and Mirasidars. The increase of land tax and heavy debt burden paved the way for new elite groups which were created after the agrarian crisis. The new taxes and the heavy tax burden pushed the peasants to borrow more money from money

lending communities. The negligence of irrigation sources, Zamindar's litigations and heavy debts led the peasants to sell or mortgage the land to money lending community or Nattukottai chetties. The Nattukottai chetties of Ramnad were initially projected as traders, but gradually developed to bankers for government, Zamindars and peasants. Ultimately they had a supreme position in the social structure. In the second half of nineteenth century they became landowners of Ramnad through money lending.

Whenever the Ramnad Zamindari faced litigation issue, minority issues of Zamindar's heir or issues of adoption of the Zamindars, the government appointed, the Court of Wards to manage the estate the issues were resolved. In this case Raja Ram Rao notes that Ramnad Zamindari was under the control of Court of Wards for twenty one years (1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889). He argues that under this control, Zamindars and peasants faced several issues and they were treated badly and the condition was very bad and he notes that under the control of Court of Wards, peoples and peasant's condition was very good and that ryots' problems were solved under the supervision of Court of Wards.

The Ryot of Ramnad Zamindari faced difficulties by Zamindars and the Court of Wards; because both of them indented to get more revenue from ryots not considering the welfare of the Ryots. The government made new acts to collect more land revenue and Zamindars were the tools of the government to implement its notion. The government's economic policy towards Ramnad Zamindari was only to get more and regular income from the agrarian sector. They considered cultivators promoter of their wealth; so they wanted to save them by issuing Acts and protecting them legally from the Zamindar and government officers. Ultimately the Zamindar's rule or government reign made peasant groups suffer and struggle for survival in the

Ramnad Zamindari. There were some wealthy peasants who filed suits against the Zamindar to oppose their occupation of land and rate of assessment in the second half of the nineteenth century. Peasants were not successful in their revenue suits because of the power and financial influence of Zamindars. In the nineteenth century, the circumstances were created new kinds of elite group in the southern Tamil society such as Money lenders; due to their influence, land right was transformed to one group of cultivator to other wealthy groups. As a result, the condition and life of peasant was horrible. They struggled for their survival whether it was the Company rule or Zamindar's reign in the Ramnad Zamindari.

**Chapter 4**  
**Economic Transformation, Religious Conversion and Social  
Legitimacy in Ramnad Zamindari**

**Contents**

1. Chetties
2. Early History, Migration and Commercial Activities of Chetties up to the 16th Century
3. Trade and Banking Activities of the Nattukottai Chetties since the 17th Century
4. Emergence of New Elite Groups and Peasant Migration
5. Change of Land ownership from Maravans to Nattukottai Chetties
6. Shanans: Toddy Tappers to Trading Community
7. Economical Growth and Social Status of Shanans
8. Social Imbalance and Religious Conversion
9. Economic Transformation, Social Legitimacy and Caste Conflict
  - 9.1. Kalugumalai Riot (7<sup>th</sup> April 1895)
  - 9.2. Sivakasi Riot (6<sup>th</sup> June 1899)
  - 9.3. Kamudi Riot (1898-99)
10. The part played by the Zamindar of Ramnad in the Caste Conflict
11. Overview

There was a major economic transformation that took place in the society of the Ramnad Zamindari during the second half of the nineteenth century. There was lack of proper and sincere land administration leading to economic downturn and social imbalance in Ramnad. The Zamindars' and their managers'

mismanagement and government officials' fake land survey were important reasons for the economic downturn. The Zamindars were spending lavishly for maintaining their prestige, festival celebrations and personal functions which compelled them to borrow money from private lenders, especially, Nattukottai chetties who traditionally hailed from a wealthy community in southern Tamil country. As the Zamindars were unable to repay their debt<sup>1</sup>, borrowed from moneylenders, they imposed new taxes<sup>2</sup> and increased tax in the agrarian sector, thus making the peasants to be the burden of tax. Meanwhile conditions of famine and drought pushed the peasants to borrow from debt from money lenders and wealthy landlords. Unable to repay the debt and retrieve the mortgaged land, the peasant were forced to sell the land and made them volunteer as slaves to the landlord for the borrowed amount.

As an impact of Zamindari settlement in the Ramnad the ownership of land was transformed to from the landowning Maravans to the Nattukottai chetties, another wealthy group of the society. At the end of the nineteenth century the Ramnad Rajas faced heavy debt due to large expenses involved in litigation cases of Ramnad Zamindari. Therefore they started to practice of leasing land to individuals at favourable rates. In such kinds of lease known as *cowle*, the share of the government was, paid in cash instead of in grains. These were dealt to royal family members, charitable trusts and money lenders or

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<sup>1</sup> Loan due of Ramnad Zamindari to Government for the fasli 1291 (1881) Rs. 14,22,830, the balance of interest due on the loan at the beginning of the fasli was Rs. 35,546-13-4 which added with current loan amount and totally Rs. 1,06,476-0-1 and of this amount Rs. 71,141-8-0 was paid in the current fasli year. *Proceedings of the Court of Wards*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1883. No.1845, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Tree tax, water tax, vaikkolvvari* (straw tax) *kalappichchai, palankatchi, padakanikai* and *sarasari tax* (average), see chapter 2, p.28 for more explanations about these taxes. *Board of Revenue* 21.12.1882, No. 3198,19; *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II,(Madras: Government Press, 1938), 129.

Nattukottai chetties.<sup>3</sup> Nattukottai chetties became a prominent group by lending money to the Rajah of Ramnad for paying tribute to the government. The present chapter will discuss and analyse the transformation of the moneylenders into landowners, Zamindars into debtors, peasants into landless labourers and Shanans emerging to oppose the social domination of Maravans and the resulting social conflicts in the Ramnad Zamindari.

## 1. Chetties

Earlier those who involved in trading activities they were named title themselves as 'Chetti' or 'Setti'. The *Marwaries*, *Guzeratis* and *Lalas* were the trading communities of the other part of the India. The Chetties mostly found in Kistna, Nellore, Cuddappa, Kurnool, Madura, Coimbatore and Madras in the Madras Presidency.<sup>4</sup> The term *chetti* is derived from '*sreshti*' which means chief merchant. They were mainly financiers, bankers and trustees. The classical epic *Manimekalai* refers to the term *chetti* meaning 'traders' and it was one of the occupation terms used to mean the 'mercantile community'. Through the age of sangam they were denoted as the merchant communities. Later the name chetti or chettiar came to be used to indicate caste title. Some of them migrated to South East Asia and continued their traditional profession in overseas countries.<sup>5</sup> During the period of the Cholas and the Pandyas the merchant community was

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<sup>3</sup> Nattukottai Chetties community peoples were found mostly in Pudukkottai, Ramnad, Karaikudi, Devakottai and Pallathur in the southern Tamil region.

<sup>4</sup> *Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871 with Appendix*, Vol. I ( Madras: Government Press, 1874), 142.

<sup>5</sup> D. Sivakala, *Trading Communities in Early Tamilagam* (Kanyakumari: Nataraja Publication, 2007), 20.

known as *vaisyas* who were called 'Yeti'. This term was later changed to 'chetti'.  
Ramnad, Sivaganga and Pudukkottai were their major settlements.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Madras Presidency Caste and Tribe Survey records, there were three kinds of classes among the *chetties* in the Madura region, such as *Nattukottai chetties*, *Ariyur chetties* and *Eriyur chetties*.<sup>7</sup> The *Beri chetties* had sub clans like *Ayirathan chetties* and *Inuutran chetties*.<sup>8</sup> S.M. Kamal mentions that the *chetties* had three divisions, like *Ayirai vaisiyar*, *Madurai chetties* and *chetties*.<sup>9</sup> They had various sub-divisions among them, such as *Beri chetties*, *Nagarattar chetties*, *Kasukkarar chetties*, *Lanka chettis*, *Kuthirai chetties* and *Nattukkottai chetties*.<sup>10</sup> C.D. Maclean classifies them as *Beri chetties*, *Comaties/Komattis*, *Bunniahs*, *Marwaries*, *Oilmongers* and *Cashcaurar*. The *Cometies* claimed to be *Vaisyas*. In the South, the money lenders or bankers were called *Cashcaurer*.<sup>11</sup> Among the trading caste there were two major divisions like bankers and moneylenders, in southern region trading castes people were called as *kasikkarar*. Among the *Chetties* there was a dispute between *Komatti chetties* and *Beri chetties* on social status. *Komatti chetties* considered themselves superior to *Beri chetties*.<sup>12</sup> Some of the people, called themselves *chetties*, like *Velan chetties* who lived in Srivilliputtur and Rajapalayam areas. They worshipped their god 'Pattani'. The *Saliyar* community people who lived in

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<sup>6</sup> R. Lakshminaranayan, *Chettinad* (Chennai: Pavai Publication), 46-49.

<sup>7</sup> M.A. Sherring, *The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency*, Part II (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2003), 107.

<sup>8</sup> K.K. Pillay, *Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum* (Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 2007), 490.

<sup>9</sup> Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Sivakala, *Trading communities in Early Tamilagam*, 21; K.S. Ramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture*, Vol.3 (New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 2002), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Maclean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency* Vol 2, 227.

<sup>12</sup> Rramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture*, Vol.3, 39; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol .5, 255.



Thiruchuli and Aruppukottai considered themselves as Chetties.<sup>13</sup> The *Manjaputhu* chetties were the earlier settlers at Pamban.<sup>14</sup> In north western part of India, trading communities were known as Oswals, Agarwalas and Tatis.<sup>15</sup> Nattukottai chetties settled at Nattukottai in the Madurai region and had migrated from the Chola Kingdom to the Pandya territory during the classical age. Historians opine that the term '*nattukottai*' literally means 'a country fort'; D. Sivakala states that '*nattukottai*' is a corruption from "Nattarasankottai", a small village near Sivaganga.<sup>16</sup> The Chetties were known as *Nagarathars*. Pamela G Price opines that Nattukottai chetties' maritime trading activities started in the eighth century.<sup>17</sup> The Setupathis' Copper plates do not mention the name of Nagarathar or Nattukottai chetties.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Early History, Migration and Commercial Activities of Chetties up to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century**

They began their money lending business as small scale industries in the sixteenth century but their commercial activities were known since 1000 A.D.<sup>19</sup> There are different legends or traditional views about the origin of Nattukottai chetties. One among the story was that, they originally lived in Kaverippattinam

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<sup>13</sup> N. Rajendran, *The National Movement in Tamil Nadu: 1905-14: Agitational Politics and State coercion*, Madras (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25-26; S. M. Kamal, & N. Muhammad Cherif, *Ramanathapuram Mavattam Varalathru Kurippugal* (Paramakudi: Lenin Samuga Varalathru Aratchi Niruvanam, 1984), 148-149.

<sup>14</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 934.

<sup>15</sup> *Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871 with Appendix*, Vol. I (Madras: Government Press, 1874), 44

<sup>16</sup> Sivakala, *Trading communities in Early Tamilagam*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Lakshminaranayan, *Chettinad*, 46-49.

<sup>18</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 12-13; Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Heiko Schrader, 'The Socioeconomic Function of Moneylenders in Expanding Economics: The Case of the Chettiars,' *Savings and Development* 16, No.1(1992): 69.

located near Kumbakonam and migrated to Madura as the Chola king demanded matrimonial alliance with them. They refused the king's wishes and migrated to Madura region. But there are no clear details about the name of the Chola ruler who demanded to marry their girl. According to K.S. Ramasamy Sastri, among the Nattukottai chetties there were three subdivisions such as *Sundaram*, *Ariyur* and *Ilayattakkudi*.<sup>20</sup> E. Thurston also argues that they migrated a thousand years ago from Kaverippattinam and they settled in Tirupathur and Devakottai divisions which were within the territory of the Sivaganga and Ramnad Zamindaris. They have been known as the Jews of South India for their traditional occupation of money-lending.<sup>21</sup> According to K.K. Pillay, the Nattukottai Chetties migrated to Nattukottai about a thousand years ago from the town Kaverippattinam owing to the harassment of the Chola monarch.<sup>22</sup>

The tale of the migration of the chetties to Ramnad was after the Chola kings killed the chetti women and ruined their business as they disobeyed his authority. Another fiction was that the Pandyan king requested the merchants' services from the Chola king and the Chola King sent chetti community people to Pandyan-controlled territory including Ramnad.<sup>23</sup> The Nattukottai Chetties originally came from Chola country and settled in seventy eight villages, these villages were known as Chettinad. Chettinad was covered by northern part of river Vellar (Pudukkottai); Vaigai River in the south; western side by Piranmalai

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<sup>20</sup> Ramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture*, Vol.3, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol .5, 249-251.

<sup>22</sup> Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 13.

and eastern side was covered by Bay of Bengal.<sup>24</sup> The Nattukottai chetties were called *Nagarathars*; since eighth century onwards they had been involved in maritime trading activities. Initially the Nattukottai chetties emerged as itinerant merchants of salt; later in the early nineteenth century they expanded their commercial activities to Southeast Asia. European imperialism gave them the opportunity to expand their trading activities. Chettinad lies on the north-eastern side of Sivaganga, north-western side of Ramnad and southern part of Pudukkottai.<sup>25</sup> During the period of the later Pandyas, the Chetties were involved in oil mill industry. These people are mentioned in inscriptions like *sakkarapadiyar*, *mayilatti* and *sothi nagaraththar*. They built large oil mills, in Karaikudi; therefore that place was called *Sekkalaikottai*. The Ramnad Setupathis collected *sekku irai* (oil mil tax) from the Chetties of this region. This section of the community was called *Vanika* chetties.<sup>26</sup>

### **3. Trade and Banking Activities of the Nattukottai Chetties since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

The Muslims of Coromandal coastal region classified themselves into several groups, like Ravuttans or Taragans, Marakkayar, Lebbai and Deccani. The Islamic Tamil literature denotes owner of the ship was known as Marakkala Rayan in the nineteenth century. Among the Muslims who connected with maritime trade they were known as Marakkayar. The Marakkayar of Kilakkarai

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<sup>24</sup> Rajendran, *The National Movement in Tamil Nadu: 1905-14: Agitational Politics and State coercion*, 25-26.

<sup>25</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 12-13

<sup>26</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 12-13; Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 60.

was the main town of trade during the period of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the main businessmen Vallal Seethalathi or Periathambi was lived in this town. The chank export was the supreme products of this town during the period of nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The divisions of Marakkayar Muslims engaged in fishing activities called as ‘Sammatis’. They used the vessel for fishing called ‘Samban’. The Marakkayar Muslims fisherman of Ramnad coastal region was known as ‘Sammatti’.<sup>28</sup> The early Muslims of Coromandal was known as ‘Sonakar’ or ‘Sonakan’ since eighth century they were called as Yavanas as Sonakar. The Ramnad Marakkayars of coastal region called as Sonakar during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Among the Muslims those who involved in fishing activities they were known as ‘Sonakan’ and their settlement was named as Sonakavadi or Sonaka patti. The old name of Kayalpattanam was called as Songapattanam.<sup>29</sup> The Coromandel Muslims some of them called as Thulukkar, who were native of Turkey.<sup>30</sup> The earlier Muslim settlements of coastal region functioned as guilds that were called as *Anjvannam* which found in the copper plate and inscriptions of twelfth and thirteen century. The term *Anjvannam*, a Persian word which means ‘assembly’.<sup>31</sup> Nattukottai chetties and Marakkayar Muslims maintained a fine tie up with the Zamindar of Ramnad. The Marakkayars sold conch shells and pearls to maritime markets and

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<sup>27</sup> J. Raja Mohamad, “Maritime Activities Economy and Social Customs of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast 1750-1900,”(Ph.D dis., Pondicherry University, 1997), 25.

<sup>28</sup> S.M. Kamal, *Muslimkalum Thamizakamum* (Madras: Islamic Studies and Culture Centre, 1990), 49.

<sup>29</sup> Raja Mohamad, “Maritime Activities Economy and Social Customs of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast 1750-1900,” 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Yazhpana Manippayagarathi*, Chandrasekara Pulavar, American Mission Press, Jeffna, 1842, Koyilozhugu. Cited in Raja Muhammad, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Jas. Burgess, ed., *Epigraphia Indica of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Government Press, 1892), 68.

got back horses for the Maravans' army. Therefore Setupathis protected Marakkayars from the intrusion of the Dutch in coastal trade.<sup>32</sup> David Rudner and Heiko Schrader state that the Nattukottai Chetties' were initially involved in salt trade in the locale of ninety six villages<sup>33</sup> in the northern part of Ramnad in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> But by the early seventeenth century they emerged as itinerant merchants of salt and they expanded their trading activities into Southeast Asia by the early nineteenth century. Heiko Schrader notes that they changed their notion from maritime trade to money lending in the mid-nineteenth century. The *Nagarathars* lived mostly in the northeast part of Sivaganga, north western part of Ramnad and southern part of Pudukkottai which is known as Chettinad. *Nagarathars* were settled in other countries like Ceylon (Srilanka), Burma, Malaya, Siam, South-Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, Mauritius and South Africa.<sup>35</sup>

In the colonial period they were a wealthy community. During nineteenth century, the Nattukottai chetties expanded their money lending and trading business into other countries like Malaya, Ceylon, Burma and China. According to Heiko Schrader, "Chettiars were involved in finance trade, rice mills and some in agriculture in the Madras Presidency. During the colonial rule, the chetties

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<sup>32</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Later they were settled in main centre of Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Tirumangalam, Sattankudi, Palayampatti and Aruppukkotai. These are the six towns of Ramnad. Kamudi was the main town of Shanans' settlement in Ramnad Zamindari; Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 97.

<sup>34</sup> David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 56.

<sup>35</sup> Heiko Schrader, "The Socioeconomic Function of Moneylenders in Expanding Economics: The Case of the Chettiars," *Savings and Development* 16, 1(1992):69; Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars*, 56.

were allowed to collect revenue before 1778; but later this right was abolished".<sup>36</sup>

W. Francis noted that Nattukottai chetties were wealthy money lenders with headquarters in the Tirupathur and Devakottai divisions of the Sivaganga and Ramnad Zamindaries in Madura District.<sup>37</sup>

#### **4. Emergence of New Elite Groups and Peasant Migration**

The British economic policy and the Zamindars' indulgence with borrowed money and their consequent indebtedness, their putting the entire tax burden on the peasants led to the formation of new elite groups in the society. Among these emerging groups the Nattukottai chetties played a major role in the political and social order. The continuous tax burden made the peasants poor and forced them to pay higher rent for land amount which led to more debts and oppressing in the hands of the money lending community. The unsettled debts made them mortgage or sell their land to money lending groups and migrate to other areas.

The British imposed and increased agricultural share and tax which caused sale of food grains by the ryots to compensate for cultivation of commercial crops. The entry of the commercial crops in the agriculture sector created and promoted starvation in all the seasons. The commercialisation of agriculture<sup>38</sup> created unending problems among the tenants or peasants. The commercialisation of agriculture increased the revenue of the government but the

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<sup>36</sup> Heiko Schrader, 'The Socio-economic Function of Moneylenders in Expanding Economics: The Case of the Chettiars,' *Savings and Development* 16, 1 (1992): 70.

<sup>37</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol .V, 250.

<sup>38</sup> If ryots cultivated commercial products like Cotton, Tobacco, etc. who will get tax exemption from the water tax from well; *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II, 146.

status of ryots became more underprivileged. These causes led to increasing poverty, sale or mortgage, transfer of land; and the peasant became debtors. Commercialisation of agriculture augmented the debt of peasants in India which rose from Rs 3,000 million in 1911 to as 18,000 million in 1938, a six fold increase.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1850's due to arrears of *peshcush* to the Company and the mismanagement of the Zamindari, the Setupathis became dependent on financial creditors or Nattukottai chetties. Gradually, their credit or loan increased and Zamindars leased some villages to creditors for the compensation of the loans. Ramnad Zamindars borrowed more amounts for administrating and spent it for litigation. Most of the land revenue was utilised for the litigation by the Zamindars; thus they did not give emphasis to irrigation sources. For maintaining the administration and litigation cost, Zamindars borrowed lump amounts of money from the lending community. Later they could not repay their debts and they gave some villages to chetties as lease for the compensation of the debt. During the second half of nineteenth century the Zamindars began to lose their financial power because of the suits of *Nagarathars* or Nattukottai chetties against the Ramnad Zamindars in Madura court.<sup>40</sup> During Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar (1846-1862), Zamindarini of Ramnad leased twenty four villages of Devakottai to Devakottai Nagarathar Arunachalam. Again in the 1860s and 1870s Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-73) had to mortgage some other

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<sup>39</sup> Devireddy Subramanyam Reddy, "Emergence of Landless Class in Colonial Southern India," in *Colonial State, Capital and Labour In India*, ed. K.Venugopal Reddy (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2015), 78.

<sup>40</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 94.

villages to Arunachalam.<sup>41</sup> The two villages of Nitchangudi, in Pallimadam Taluk and Kilachambadacky village of Muthukulathur taluk, granted lease under the *cowle* tenure for forty years in 1868 and 1869.<sup>42</sup> According to N. Rajendran, in the southern Tamil country, two capital communities played an important role. One was Kallidaikurichy Brahmins (Tinnevely district) and the other was Nattukottai chetties of Chettinad. The outsiders like *Marwaris* were the other important capitalists in the southern Tamil country. In 1896, the total numbers of the chetties were around 10,000; but later they increased and dominated socially.<sup>43</sup>

During sixteenth century, the invasion of Muslim troops led to agricultural caste's mass migration into southern Tamil country. The agricultural caste (*Pallans* and others) migrated to Ramnad in the sixteenth century and other castes like *Udaiyar* farmers of northern Tamil region, pastoralists, shepherds, accountants, tank-diggers, weavers, artisans and Telugu speaking people of Andra migrated to southern Tamil country. Jesuit records noted that several castes of Ramnad migrated from northern region to Ramnad during the sixteenth century. Agricultural castes like *Vellalans*, *Muthalis*, *Ahambadiyans*, *Kallans* migrated from Thondaimandalam to Pandya Mandalam during the period of Adondai Chakravarti. *Gounders* came from Andra and Kannada countries.<sup>44</sup> David Washbrook notes that many people migrated to other territories for various

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<sup>41</sup> Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> C.S. Crole, *Collector of Madura, to the Acting Secretary to the Court of Wards*, 30th September 1885, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Rajendran, *The National Movement in Tamil Nadu: 1905-14: Agitational Politics and State coercion*, 25-26.

<sup>44</sup> David Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82; J. H. Nelson, *The Madura Country A Manual*, 27; Lalitha, *Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai*, 154.



reasons like frequent wars, failure of crops, for seeking protection and for working as armed mercenaries. In 1814, one lakh people of Ramnad Zamindari migrated due to various reasons. This cause reduced the total population of the Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>45</sup> In 1820s, the cultivators of Pallimadam taluk migrated to Tanjore and Pudukottai regions for survival.<sup>46</sup> After the introduction of permanent settlement in Madras, owing to the high loans the cultivators, landless labourers migrated to neighbouring countries like Mauritius, South-east Africa, West Indies and Burma.<sup>47</sup> In 1909, the report of Ceylon Labour Commission states the total number of the Tamil migration into their country was almost 42,000 people of *Paraiyans*, 29,000 of *Pallans*, 18,000 of *Ambalagars*(Maravans), 16,000 of *Kallans*, 14,000 of *Vellalans*, 10,000 of *Agambadians* and 5 of *Brahmins*. Madura Mission notes indicate that most of the Tamils migrated to coffee and tea gardens of Ceylon, rubber estate of Malaya. Their migration was periodical and temporary; one-fifth of the women migrated to Burma and a majority of the people migrated from southern Tamil areas.<sup>48</sup>

## **5. Change of Land ownership from Maravans to Nattukottai Chetties**

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new landowning community. The revenue records and *Ramnad Manual* provide these kinds of change of land ownership rights clearly. The *pattadari* ryot borrowed cash from moneylenders for promoting irrigation or cultivation owing to the

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<sup>45</sup> *Madura District Records* Vol. 1156,189-199; Vol.4671, 101-111.

<sup>46</sup> *Madura District Records*, G.O. 25208, Vol. 4669.

<sup>47</sup> H. St. A. Goodrich, "Land Revenue in Madras," *The Economic Journal*, 1, 3 (September 1891): 453.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph C. Houpert, *The Madura Mission Manual* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1916), 5.

increase of rent and lack of water resources that led to failure of crops. Thus *pattadaris* could not pay regular rent to Zamindars which pushed them to get more loans from moneylenders or non-agricultural castes or Nattukottai Chetties with a heavy interest rate. Tenants could not pay or clear their debts, leading to transformation of their land rights to non-agricultural groups. In the circumstance of heavy loan burden of Zamindars and peasants, the land ownership right was transformed from the agrarian community to the money lending community.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was plenty of land transformation in the Ramnad Zamindari, especially from the Zamin Maravans to Nattukottai chetties. On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1847, in the period of Parvata Vardhani Natchiyar's Zaminship, she faced litigations from Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar who was the adoptive mother of Ramasami Setupathis. Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar gave twenty three villages to Muthu Veerayi for withdrawing the case; she gave these villages to Sivasami Tevar who was her adopted son. In the 1850s, he had sold these twenty three villages to A.L.A.R Ramasami Chettiar for unpaid debt.<sup>49</sup> The Zamindars leased<sup>50</sup> most of the villages to Chetties for the reimbursement of borrowed loan. Zamindars were in a position to mortgage some villages to reduce their debt to Nattukottai chetties. Therefore, in the 1860s and the early 1870s two taluks of Ramnad were mortgaged to two Nattukkottai chettiars named

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<sup>49</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 482-487.

<sup>50</sup> In 1866, Maraneri village of Muthukulathur taluk was granted on *cowle* for twenty years to Futtas Muhamed of Ramnad for Rs 140. In case of arrears of Estate, government attached *Cowle* village to *Ayan* or *Amani* village, for example in 1884 based on Rent Recovery Act VII of 1865 attached two *cowle* village Udayankarungulam (Ramnad taluk) and Puliathi (Rajasingamangalam Taluk) attached and soled for the revenue arrears and converted as *Amani* village. In 1869 the village of Udayankarungulam was leased on *cowle* to Muthusami Pillai of Ramnad for forty years. In 1870 the village Puliati was granted to Christian Pillai of Ramnad for forty years. *Letter from E.Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards*, 12.10.1887, 5; Vialur of Muthukulathur taluk granted *cowle* lease to Nagur Mira Rowthan of Abiramam for 20 year in 1861. *Court of Wards* 23.06.1883 No.1815.

Chidambaram and Subramaniam. Further, three divisions were leased to two cousins of Chettiars, namely Narayan and Vairavan. Further, two more divisions of the Ramnad taluk were mortgaged to Ramanathan Chettiar for the Zamindar's heavy loan.<sup>51</sup> Mostly the petty landholders of the ryots were depending on *sahukar*(money lenders) for payment of land assessment. They repaid the amount partly from their land yielding and partially from earning by labour.<sup>52</sup> In the 1870s, Ramnad Zamindars planned to lease villages for getting more revenue from the land, thus the village of Kuvarkuttam in Muthukulathur taluk was granted as *cowle*<sup>53</sup> lease for thirty years; but in 1878 the *Cowldar* failed to pay the *porruppu*(*annual lease amount*) , therefore Courts of Wards was incorporated the village in the *ayen*.<sup>54</sup>

During the nineteenth century, Nattukottai chetties of Chettinad were capital controllers, who played a vital role in providing credit and banking services in the agrarian society. In Ramnad and Sivaganga *inam* land and *ayen* villages came under Nattukottai Chetties' control. *Devastanam* and *Chattram* villages also came under their control and they rebuilt and administrated major temples. During the period between 1880 and 1924 they took 34 villages and 58 tanks as lease and endowed Kalayarkovil temple and repaired the temple's tank of the Sivaganga Zamindari.<sup>55</sup> In the southern part of the Ramnad Zamindari, due to the mortgage and indebtedness, 40 to 75 percent of the land ownership was passed into the hands of new social groups comprising of (i) *Manjakuppam*

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<sup>51</sup> Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 104.

<sup>52</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Certain village leased for individual to certain period for the fixed rent or *poruppu*

<sup>54</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 490-492.

<sup>55</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 127.

chetties (who were the professional money lenders) (ii) Muslim trading community and (iii) Udayar, Shanans, Yadavas, etc.,<sup>56</sup> The Zamindars of Devakottai who were mostly Nattukottai chetties controlled tenants in their territories. Chetties's pannai or private land in the villages, Maravans appointed as *munsifs* or revenue officers who collected *melvaram* shared from their land.<sup>57</sup>

From the 1900's onwards they began to divert their funds from money lending to industrial line. They invested more capital in industrial lines during the twentieth century. This community selected the textiles industry as their initial investment target. Prior to 1900, textile sector has been invested with little amounts from south Indian entrepreneurs. Most of the capital invested in textile had come from local British traders. The chetties' investments in industry as a whole were not meagre, given the conditions of colonial rule and the weak pace of industrialisation in Madras. In 1907, Vairavan Chettiar and M.L.M Ramanathan Chettiar invested seven lakh rupees in the Kamatchi mill project, while Somasundaram Chettiar invested six and half lakh in Kaleeswara mill at Coimbatore.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Report of the Madras Land Act Committee* Part II, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Mosse, *The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India*, 127; P. Sarveswaran, "Zamindars, the Feudal lords of Tamilnad," *South Indian History Congress Proceedings of 4th annual Conference* held at Tirupathi, (March 1984), 2-4.

<sup>58</sup> Ramaswami Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture*, Vol. 2, 198-199.

## 6. Shanans: Toddy Tappers to Trading Community

Shanans<sup>59</sup> were engaged in toddy tapping or climbing tree (*Panaiyeri* or *Panameri* in Tamil) during the months from March to September. The rest of the period they were involved in agricultural work. They were mostly landless people. Some of them were landowning people but such cases were rare. Robert Hardgrave argues that there were two groups among the Shanans such as 'climbers' and 'landowners'.<sup>60</sup> Tinnevelly Shanans were involved in the profession of toddy tapping and were climbers of Palmyra tree. But in the case of Ramnad, they were considered as trading communities which might be due to the fact that they developed economically through trading.

Traditionally, the Shanans' major occupation was toddy tapping and climbing Palmyra tree and production and sale of Palmyra products.

According to Robert Hardgrave, the Shanans' home land was Thiruchendur; they migrated to Ramnad and Madurai regions in the early nineteenth century. Whereas the Shanans of Tinnevelly were given to toddy tapping and were Palmyra climbers, after the migration to Ramnad, due to their trading activities, they were considered as a trading community in the early nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup> S.M. Kamal states that those who were involved in toddy tapping were called *elavar*, *palayar*, *paduvar* and *thuvasar* and their settlement was known as *elacheri*.<sup>62</sup> The *shanan vari*, *panag kadamai*, *kalava elam* and

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<sup>59</sup>The name of the *Shanans* was continued until 1911. After the census of 1911 they were changed their *Shanans* into *Nadans* or *Nadars* in the official records, which means lord of the land; Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 132-136.

<sup>60</sup> *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society*, 1827-28 (London: 1818), 162. Cited in Hardgrave, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Kamal, & Cherif, *Ramanathapuram Mavattam Varalatra Kurippugal*, 152.

*elam punja vari* were collected from Shanans during the pre-British period.<sup>63</sup> The Shanans of Tinnevely were socially oppressed by dominant castes like Maravans, Nayakkans and other caste Hindus. Whereas some of them became converts to Christianity, some remained Hindus. Gradually, Shanans economically progressed and they were the only caste to oppose the domination of the other Hindus castes especially the Maravans. Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans of the southern Tamil country mostly depended on these caste Hindus and they could not make progress economically owing to the nature of their servile occupation as agricultural labourers.

The Manual and Gazettes provide multiple explanations about the subdivisions of Shanans. Robert Caldwell argued and classified two categories among the Shanans, that during the period of later Pandyas who had superior status of Shanans were known as Nadars and later the position of lower status, like tree-climbers were called as Shanans who migrated from south Kerala to Kanyakumari. But Robert Hardgrave argued that Shanans were indigenous people of Tinnevely.<sup>64</sup> According to H. R. Pate, Shanans had five sub-divisions such as *Manatan* or *Karukkumattaiyan*, *Menattan*, *Kodikkal* or *Nattati*, *Kavadipurathan* or *Kaveripurathan*, and *Pulukka shanan*.<sup>65</sup> Edgar Thurston lists out the five divisions among the Shanans such as *Karukku-pattayar*, *Mel-nattar*, *Nattati*, *Kodikkal* and *Kalla*.<sup>66</sup> Salem Gazette mentions that two divisions there among the Shanans such as *Kongu Shanans* and *Kalyana Shanans*.<sup>67</sup> According

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<sup>63</sup> Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1985), 47.

<sup>65</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I, 129.

<sup>66</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol .VI, 376-377.

<sup>67</sup> F.J. Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers, Salem*, Part I, (Madras: 1918), 183-184.

to Census report of 1871, Shanans of southern Tamil country came migrated to and from Ceylon. Shanans were traders, cultivators, toddy-drawers, among them five per cent entertained in trading, 20.8 per cent involved in cultivating, 13.7 percent connected with food, drinks and stimulants, 17.2 percent of Shanans were labourers. The palm cultivators of Malabar and Travancore were known as 'Tiyars', in Canara 'Billawar', northern or Telugu districts called as 'Idaiyas'.<sup>68</sup>Tanjore Gazette states that there were three groups like *Tennan* (Coconut), *Panan* (Palmyra) and *Eetchan* (wild date).<sup>69</sup> According to S.M. Kamal, Shanans had two sub-castes among them, such as *Thakshina Mara Nadan* and *Hindu Nadan*.<sup>70</sup> Robert Caldwell opines that Shanans migrated to Tamil country from the northern coast of Ceylon. To support his view he gives the information how the caste *Shandror* in Ceylon came to be known in its corrupt form of *Shanan*.<sup>71</sup> David Ludden viewed that, Shanans migrated from southern Travancore to Tinnevely district during the early nineteenth Century.<sup>72</sup> Edgar Thurston states that Shanans was considered as the equal meaning of 'Sanror' which literally means 'learned' or 'noble people'.<sup>73</sup> Some other reasons also supporting this argument are the Shanans of southern Tamil country had several other names like *Elavar*, *Tiyans* etc. Robert Hardgrave argues by differentiating the Shanans as 'climbers' and 'landowners'. Hardgrave notes that Shanans were a landowning community, because they paid land tax as well as tree tax. The

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<sup>68</sup> *Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871 with Appendix*, Vol. I, 162-163.

<sup>69</sup> T. Venkataswami, *Manual of Tanjore District* (Madras: 1883), 201. Cited in Hardgrave, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Kamal, & Cherif, *Ramanathapuram Mavattam Varalatra Kurippugal*, 152.

<sup>71</sup> Ramaswami Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture*, Vol.3, 44.

<sup>72</sup> *Papers Relating to the Revenue Settlement of Tinnevely* (Chennai : Tamil Nadu Archives), 83-97.

<sup>73</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol .VI, 294; Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I, 125.

Shanans of Aruppukottai, Virudhunagar and Palayampatti purchased land in Madurai on east Masi street in 1813.<sup>74</sup> Rhenius noted in 1827 “among them (Shanans) there are rich and poor, high and low, intelligent and ignorant, masters and servants, proprietors of land, trees and villages and labourers... their main occupation was cultivation of Palmyra tree (*Borassus Flabelliformis*), others were involved in merchandize”.<sup>75</sup>

## 7. Economical Growth and Social Status of Shanans

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, most of the Shanans of southern Tinnevely were engaged in climbing Palmyra trees. Some of the Shanans were engaged in trading activities, using the Palmyra products, dried fish and salt. Initially they performed their trade in Ramnad Kingdom by using bullock carts. Gradually, they made *pettai* or trading centre in Ramnad and later they migrated and settled in the new trading centre. They moved from Tiruchendur via Tenkasi and settled in Ramnad. They first settled in the town of Sivakasi in 1821 and later they spread across Virudhunagar (Virudupatti), Tirumangalam, Sattankudi, Palayampatti and Aruppukottai, all these town, were called ‘Six Towns of Ramnad’.<sup>76</sup> Later Kamudi was also one of the major settlements of Shanans.

Turnbull’s survey of Ramnad region noted that in 1814, Aruppukottai of Ramnad zamindari some of the Shanans were settled as wealthy traders. Their

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<sup>74</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 104.

<sup>75</sup> *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society*, 1827-28, 162. Cited in Hardgrave, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 96-97.



trading activities had begun in the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>77</sup> Shanans developed by trading and mercantile activities in Ramnad during the nineteenth century. They gained importance as mediators and moneylenders of Ramnad. In Ramnad, Shanans were wealthy and hired the Maravans as their palanquin bearers; it shows the economical growth and social status of Shanans in the nineteenth century. In Coimbatore, Salem and Trichinopoly districts most of the Shanans businessmen called themselves as 'Chetties' and 'Pillai'. In the 1860s, the Shanans were well developed in economical status and started to claim a superior status or equal status to caste Hindus. They gradually started to practise Brahmnical rituals and Sanskritised aspects of life.<sup>78</sup>

The Shanans were considered as inferior to Sudras by so-called caste Hindus. But the Shanans considered themselves superior to Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkilyans of the agricultural community, which were considered polluted castes by Shanans, because of their food habits. The Shanans were found throughout Ramnad, but their presence was more in Kamudi and Pallimadam Taluk. Among these people, many of them were engaged in agriculture and trade in later days. Thus Shanans formed a wealthy social group as some of them were land owning people, some of them involved in cultivating and the rest of them in the merchant and trading activities.<sup>79</sup>

Earlier, Shanans were treated badly by the high caste Hindus owing to their poor economical status. The Shanans realised this and tried to improve

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Turnbull, '*Statistical and Geographical Memoirs*', cited in Hardgrave, 98.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Caldwell, "Observations on the Kudumi," *Indian Antiquary*, IV (1875): 168-169.

<sup>79</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 36; Anthony Good, "The Burning Question. Sacred and Profane Space in a South Indian Temple Town," *Anthropos*, 94, H.1./3. (1999): 70.

economically and changed their traditional occupation to trading. So they dynamically changed their life pattern. They entered cotton industries in Virudhunagar, Sattur, Thirumangalam and Tuticorin which were the important trading centres of the Shanans. The term 'Shanan' was officially changed in the 1911 census, as they were unwilling to project their caste as 'Shanan' which directly indicated their traditional profession of toddy tapping and tree climbing. After the growth of their economical aspect they were eager to show their identity as Kashtriyas. Therefore, they were willing to be called Nadan or Nadar which means 'lord of the land'. G.T. Boag denoted that " the Shanans of 1911 now appears as a Nadar or Nadans; this, done under the order of the government of Madras, that is word Shanans should cease to be used in officials records,..... in deference to the wishes of the Nadar community."<sup>80</sup>

## **8. Social Imbalance and Religious Conversion**

The social imbalance, inequality and discrimination in the Tamil society forced the Shanans to convert to Christianity to get social status and social respect among other caste Hindus. The Christian Missionaries primarily started their work of spreading the Christian ideology among the common people who suffered socially and economically. They utilised the social discrimination and inequality prevailing in Indian society to convert the people to their religious faith. *Paravans* or fishers were initially converted to Roman Catholic Christianity to secure their social and economic status. Later, the Shanans' converted to

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<sup>80</sup> G.T. Boag, *Report on the Census Madras, 1921*, 13, Part I (Madras: 1922), 153.

Christian faith for getting social honour. Paraiyans and some of the Pallans and other castes were willing to follow the Christian religions.

Most of the Vellalans, Chetties, Maravans, Kallans and Agambadians were not interested in conversion to the Christian religions. Rarely can we find evidence for conversion of these people into other religions, because there was no need to change their religious status to improve their social respect. In case of the marginalised people and socially oppressed people, they were willing to convert to Christianity to get social value. Thus there was no way for caste Hindus to change their identity or religion in the Ramnad Zamindari. The ruling Maravans were staunch followers of the Saiva Hindu sect, However patronised all Hindu sects and other religions. During the reign of Kilavan Setupathis, he did not agree to royal family members following the Christian faith. Therefore, he initially warned and later persecuted and killed John De Britto of the Jesuit Mission for his activities of conversion in the Ramnad region. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Setupathis patronised all the religions and tolerated the propagation of the Christian faith in the Ramnad Zamindari. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of Christians gradually increased which is shown in the census records. The Christian Missionaries provided education, professional status and home to the converted people and thereby increased the number of converts to Christianity.

In Southern Tamil Country, Christianity was first introduced on the west coast from early time of Saint Thomas. The Portuguese made much effort to conversion in the sixteenth century, later Roman Catholics and Protestant made the Southern Tamil country as their platform to their religious conversion. In

1600 onwards Christian missionaries started their conversion activities in the Madura district and Ramnad region.<sup>81</sup> Three major Missionaries played key roles in the Ramnad Zamindari such as the Roman Catholic Mission, S.P.G Mission (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and the American Mission. Among the Christian Missionaries the Roman Catholic Mission was the earliest and largest in the Ramnad Zamindari. The Roman Catholic Mission churches were built in Sargani, Kockurani, Suranam, Muthupettai, Kamudi, Pamban and Ramnad. Among these churches, the Muthupettai church was endowed by Muthuramalinga Setupathi (1780-1781), who donated Tenjiendal village of Ramnad taluk to the church.<sup>82</sup> According to H. R. Pate, Shanans formed the bulk of the protestant community and half of the number of the Roman Catholics.<sup>83</sup>

The Madura Mission, a Jesuit mission chose the southern Tamil country for its mission to spread Christianity. The Catholic Mission made the Tamil language their mode for preaching their ideas. Hence, they tried and knew about the language and culture of the region and translated Tamil literature to other languages to know the culture of the Tamil country.<sup>84</sup> Christianity played an essential role in the development of the depressed people in the Tamil society. The social inequalities based on the economic disparities created a social hierarchical order, where there was no place for the marginalised people or landless labourers. The Christian Missionaries utilised this uneven social order to

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<sup>81</sup> Ramasamy, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, 163.

<sup>82</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 136-141.

<sup>83</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I, 131.

<sup>84</sup> Bishop Caldwell (1814 - 1891) studied the Tamil language and wrote book on *The Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* and G.U. Pope (1820-1908) translated Tamil works of *Thirukkural*, *Thiruvagam* and *Manimegalai* into English language. Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu: A Real History*, 334.

spreading the Christian ideology to convert the masses to Christianity from the sixteenth century onwards. In the initial step, they started their work by starting schools to promote their ideology. Initially, the Paravans and Mukkuvans (fishing community) were converted to Christianity, followed by Kammalans, Pallans, Vanniyan, Cheruman, Chakkiliyan and other depressed groups of people.<sup>85</sup>

In 1685, Jesuit missionaries under Father Borghese who was the first resident missionary placed at Kamanayakkanpatti carried out his conversion work among the Shanans at Vadakkankulam, Nanguneri taluk, Tuticorin.<sup>86</sup> In same year, a church was built at Vadakkankulam, in Tuticorin and the Church act of 1698 recognised that the Company could support missionaries who started charity schools in Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Ramnad and Sivaganga. With efforts of Fr. Shwartz of the SPG Mission, a permanent mission was started in 1701. The ‘Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge’<sup>87</sup> (SPCK) was established in Madras for spreading Christianity. In 1717 SPCK missionaries started two charity schools for promoting the poor people in Madras. They used education as a tool to promote their ideology among the people. As a result Reverend Swartz established English Schools at Tanjore, Ramnad and Sivaganga initially. The Jesuit missionaries made Trichinopoly the centre for their mission. They targeted marginalised people to enhance their religious following and for that they utilised

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<sup>85</sup> Vijaya Ramasamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils, Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Culture*, (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 38-40.

<sup>86</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I, 90.

<sup>87</sup> In 1698 SPCK founded by Thomas Bray. <http://spckpublishing.co.uk/about-spck/mission/>

the caste discriminations followed in the Indian Society.<sup>88</sup> In 1720, Jesuit mission converted three thousand Shanans of Vadakankulam to Christianity. The Anglican Missionary society was started in 1771 in Tinnevely. In 1784, Rayappan was the first person who converted to Protestantism among the Shanans community.<sup>89</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth century, missionaries gradually lost the Company's patronage to spread Christianity, as the Company was involved in establishing administrative setup in entire India. In the eighteenth century, the conversion to Christianity attained its zenith.<sup>90</sup> In 1834 American Madura Mission was established by American Jaffna Mission and established new school in Madras, Ramnad and Dindigul. This protestant mission started major educational institution at Palayamkottai and Nagarcoil.<sup>91</sup> In the 1840s, Catholic and Protestant Christian missionaries brought changes in the Shanans' social status by conversion. Missionaries enabled Shanans to get education and professional opportunities which facilitated gradual progress and led to more conversion of Shanans to Christianity in the Ramnad Zamindari.<sup>92</sup>

The American Mission had its headquarters at Mandapasalai in Pallimadam taluk. The English monthly magazine '*The Banner of the Cross*' was started to promote the Christian ideology in the second half of the nineteenth

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<sup>88</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu: A Real History*, 324; Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 43.

<sup>89</sup> Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings, Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 407.

<sup>90</sup> G. Venkadesan, *Tharkala Tamilnattu Varalaru 1600-2011*, (Rajapalayam: VC Publication, 2011), 170-172

<sup>91</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu: A Real History*, 324.

<sup>92</sup> Ramasamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils, Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Culture*, 38-40.

century. In 1873, S.P.G Mission converted 361 persons into Christianity and it was increased to 4,123 in 1889 and their establishment of Schools increased from 179 to 1228. The Christian missionaries especially S.P.G. Mission formed two large orphanages for boys and girls after great famine of 1876-77.<sup>93</sup> The Missionaries treated people equally with social service activities, attracting the marginalised people towards Christianity.

Due to the existence of several groups and divisions among the Shanans they lacked unity in the first two decades of nineteenth century. The Shanans of Ramnad whether Hindu or Christian, formed *mahimai* for uniting them into one group. The Shanans merchants and businessmen's contribution amount to *mahimai* was spent for the welfare of the Shanans community. For controlling the *mahimai* activities they appointed a head known as *uravinmurai*.<sup>94</sup> Most of the Shanans migrated from Tinnevely to Ramnad and Madurai due to the ill treatment of the caste Hindus. Having settled in Ramnad and Madurai as traders and merchants, the migrated Shanans felt that they were a minority among other castes and planned to unite other Shanans into one group and therefore they established '*uravinmurai*'. Gradually Shanans achieved economic progress as traders and money-lenders in Ramnad and adopted Sanskritised cultural practices to get social superiority and equality with other caste Hindus.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 136-141.

<sup>94</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 99.

<sup>95</sup> Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings, Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, 407; Robert L. Hardgrave, "Varieties of Political Behaviour among Nadars of Tamilnad," *Asian Survey* 16, 11 (November 1996): 616-617.

## 9. Economic Transformation, Social Legitimacy and Caste Conflict

Comparatively, the Shanans achieved more economic progress than the Maravans. The Maravans faced economic crisis while, the Shanans economically progressed. In the 1860s, the British abolished *kaval* system in the southern Tamil country. As a result, the source of income was affected for Maravans. Consequently they could not tolerate the growth of the Shanans, economically and socially. The resulting rivalry between the two social groups was the main cause behind the caste conflict in the Ramnad and Tinnevely region.<sup>96</sup> The Ramnad Setupathis of the Maravan community were considered superior to Shanans. The Setupathi was the controller of the all the temples (*Dharmakartha*) of the Ramnad region. The Shanans were socially treated as untouchables and lower than caste Hindus. Therefore, they were banned to enter the Hindu temples. Initially Shanans were inferior in the economical status so they were socially oppressed. With their economic growth they started to claim their social identity and honour in the second half of nineteenth century. They were the pioneers among the oppressed sections of the southern Tamil country who began to struggle against caste domination. They stood against the caste Hindus and their social discriminations.

The Shanans' opposition of the caste domination through the temple entry struggle was initiated at Kanyakumari in Travancore state during the mid eighteenth century. The Temple entry struggle of Kanyakumari effort was done by means of the effect of Muthukutti Swamigal's efforts. Since mid eighteenth

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<sup>96</sup> Arun Bandopadhyay, "The Origin of a Social Conflict in South India: The Sivakasi Riots of 1899," *Studies in People's History* 1,1 (2014): 73.



century onwards the Shanans were entered into fight for their equal rights in the social order. From Travancore Shanans's resistance spread to southern Tamil country. Christianity played a major role in this disparity by providing a ladder to the oppressed people to uplift themselves in the social setup.<sup>97</sup>

As the Shamans progressed and economically developed owing to their trading and commercial activities, they aspired for a higher social status. The economic development promoted them to declare themselves as equal to Vellalans and Maravans of wealthy and rich castes. This economic progress pushed them to struggle for their rights. In the second half of nineteenth century, Shanans entered into a struggle for their social honour and opposed the upper caste domination and discriminations. In 1858, the Shanans of Travancore resisted the state and refused to follow the custom of not wearing upper garment. In 1860, there was a resistance of Shanans against Maravans at Arupukottai and Palayampatti of Pallimadam taluk.<sup>98</sup> In 1870s Shanans initiated a battle to claim their place in the social order through the Temple Entry struggle in Tiruthangal and Madurai in the Southern Tamil country. By 1870 Shanans of Tinnevely, tried to enter the Tiruchendur Temple where Brahmins and Pillais or Vellalans were opposed. In 1874, under the head of Mooka Nadar, Shanans entered Madurai Minakshi Temple and worshiped the goddess. Following this event Tiruthangal Murgan Temple entry stands as an evidence for the Shanans protest against the caste domination. In 1879 a group of Shanans attempted to enter the

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<sup>97</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu A Real History*, 371-372.

<sup>98</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 109.

temple of Sundareswara in Kamudi.<sup>99</sup> In 1885 Shanans attempted to entry to the street of Gollapatti, Sattur taluk, Tinnevelly district. As a result of this protest, four Maravans and three Shanans were killed. From the 1880s onwards the disturbance and tension between the Shanans and Maravans was a recurrent incident. The Kalugmalai Riot in Tinnevelly district was one such incident.<sup>100</sup>

### **9.1. Kalugumalai Riot (7th April 1895)**

In the 1890s the Shanans' adoption of Sanskritised customs and practices like wearing sacred thread and dhotis like Brahmins, practiced in Sivakasi, was disliked by Vellalans and Maravans, as they did not like Shanans to maintain customs equally with them.<sup>101</sup> In 1895 Shanans of Tinnevelly appealed to the British to appoint the Shanans to Tinnevelly temple committee for managing the Siva Temple. But this attempt failed.<sup>102</sup> The Social mobility of Shanans and their claims to positions of influence and power resulted in the emergence of caste conflict in the southern Tamil country.

Kalugumalai lies in Tinnevelly district; it was a part of the Ettaiyapuram Zamindary. Ettaiyapuram Zamindar was the trustee of the Kalugumalai Temple. In 1890s the Shanans population of Kalugumalai was about 500 and Maravans were numbered 475, the majority of Shanans were converted to Roman Catholic and laid claims to Kshatriya status. By 1891, among 4,10,000 of Shanans about 1,50,000 were converted to Roman Catholic. The economic development, social

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<sup>99</sup> Rajayyan, *Tamilnadu A Real History*, 371-372.

<sup>100</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevelly*, Vol. I, 126.

<sup>101</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 114.

<sup>102</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevelly*, Vol. I, 125-126.

mobility and religious conversion were the major causes for the caste conflict in the southern Tamil country.<sup>103</sup> The Zamindar of Ettayapuram as the trustee of the local temple, had obtained an injunction restraining the Shanans from using the temple's car street for religious processions. The Shanans of Kalugumalai, after conversion to the Roman Catholic mission, bought a shop in the car street of Kalugumalai and converted into a prayer hall, which was considered as a chapel. The mission constructed a *pandal* or roof in front of the new chapel or prayer hall. The Hindus were celebrating the car festival, and when the car crossed the street the *pandal* had to be removed to allow passage for the temple car to proceed. This annoyed the seventy Shanans who had stood guarding the *pandal* and they retaliated by throwing stones on the Hindus groups leading to the death of the Brahmin manager of the Ettayapuram Zamindari.. This incident aggravated the animosity between the Shanans and the high caste Hindus, especially the Maravans of Kalugumalai. In the ensuing riot seven Shanans and two members of the Ettayapuram Zamindari were killed and the Shanans quarters were burnt and looted by Maravans. Ultimately, at the behest of the Zamindar, the British government deployed additional police forces and suppressed the riot in March 1899.<sup>104</sup>

In 1895 again the Shanans attempted to enter Thiruthangal and Sivakasi Temples but these efforts were suppressed by high caste Hindus and officials. In 1896, Shanans tried to enter the Siva temple at Sivakasi, but this too was suppressed by the government with armed forces. The Sivakasi robbery on April

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<sup>103</sup> Anthony Good, "The Burning Question. Sacred and Profane Space in a South Indian Temple Town," 25-28.

<sup>104</sup> Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely*, Vol. I, 126.

26, 1899, during which the Maravans, Vellalans, Pallans and Muslims looted the Shanans commercial settlement as the economic advancement of the Shanans earned them the rivalry of Maravans, Vellalans, and Muslim traders.<sup>105</sup>

## **9.2. Sivakasi Riot (6<sup>th</sup> June 1899)**

Sivakasi, was one of the major commercial town of Shanans in Tinnevely district. Sivakasi emerged as the commercial centre of the Shanans in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The census of 1881, states that more than 13 per cent of the Tinnevely district population were Shanans and about 9 per cent were Maravans.<sup>106</sup> The census of 1891, noted that the total population of Sivakasi town was 12,184, among them 10,678 were Hindus; Muslims were 1,359 and Christians 147. The Shanans constituted 805 of the total number of Hindus of Sivakasi and Maravans were around 500. Therefore the Shanans formed the majority population.<sup>107</sup> Both the Sivakasi and Kalugumalai riots had similar events of temple entry which led to the conflict between warrior community (Maravans) and the emerging trading community (Shanans). Comparatively the Shanans were economically well advanced than Maravans. The Maravans faced severe economic problems during the second half of nineteenth century, the period the progress of Shanans. Due to the abolition of the kaval system by the British, the Maravans lost not only their income but their prestige as well. Thus they could not accept the growth of the Shanans

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<sup>105</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 239; Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 123.

<sup>106</sup> Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, 25.

<sup>107</sup> C.J. O'donnell, *Census of India, 1891, The Report Vol. III* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), 36.

economically and socially. Therefore they tried to check the progress of the Shanans, which was the main cause behind the caste conflict in the southern Tamil country.<sup>108</sup>

M. Hammick was the Inspector General of police appointed as investigator of Sivakasi riot. On 20th April 1899, some of the Maravans instigated the Chakkiliyans to wear the sacred thread and enter the Shanans temple in the outskirts of Sivakasi.<sup>109</sup> The basic cause of the Sivakasi riot was the resentment of the Maravans for being economically dependent on the Shanans of Sivakasi and in the northern part of Tinnevely. The famine condition was another major cause as the food grains were under the control of Shanans who were traders. In this circumstance, the Maravans opposed and attacked the Shanans for contributing to their economic problems and therefore to prevent Shanans' progress.<sup>110</sup> On 26<sup>th</sup> April 1900, *the Swadesamitran*, observed about Sivakasi riot and demanded the government to save the land owning communities from local disturbance or communal conflict.<sup>111</sup>

### **9.3. Kamudi Riot (1898-99)**

Kamudi in Ramnad zamindari is located forty miles south of Sivakasi. The temple of Kamudi is dedicated to the worship of Lord Subramania, and also

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<sup>108</sup> Bandopadhyay, "The Origin of a Social Conflict in South India," 73.

<sup>109</sup> *Enquiry report of Hammick, Disturbance in Madura and Tinneveli, Judicial Department*, G.O. No. 2017, dated 12 December 1899 (Chennai: Tamil Nadu Archives) Cited in Arun Bandopadhyay, 76.

<sup>110</sup> G.O. 2013, Revenue Department, Miscellaneous, dated 6 June 1899, 6; G.O. No. 2677, Revenue Department, Miscellaneous, dated 20 July 1899, 4-5.

<sup>111</sup> *Native News Paper Report 1900*, 225.

of Goddess Badrakali,<sup>112</sup> Kamudi was surrounded by Maravan dominated villages. In Kamudi, Maravans were the dominant community and Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans were dependent on them. There Shanans were the minority trading caste. This town emerged as a trading town in the late nineteenth century with Shanans and Muslims as traders and merchants. Vellasami Tevar, the leader of anti-Shanan groups, banned the entry of Shanans into Kamudi temple. He hailed from the village of Pasumpon, two miles from Kamudi. He was a locally dominant person, economically wealthy and socially influential. Before him the lower class people should remove their turban, and greet him in a humble manner. In the case of Shanans, they were in no mood to give this kind of respect to him owing to their economic power. Therefore, he collected all other caste Hindus and opposed Shanans' progress above them. When on 14th May 1897, fifteen Shanans entered the Minakshi Sundaeswara Temple in Kamudi. Baskarasami Setupathi, the Raja of Ramnad, filed a case against the Shanans for temple entry at Kamudi. Finally the court ordered Shanans to pay rupees 2,500 towards the cost of purifying the temple polluted by their entry.<sup>113</sup>

The Shanans of Kamudi collected fund Rs 42,000 rupees from Shanans of entire Tamil country and appealed this case to High court of Judicature in Madras and the judgement came in favour to Shanans. They appealed this case to the Privy Council in London in 1908. The Privy Council citing the resolution of Kamudi case by the High Court Judges, Benson and J. J. Moore stated that

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<sup>112</sup> P. Chidambaram Pillai, *Right of Temple Entry* (Chennai: MJP Publishers, 2008), 203.

<sup>113</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 120-122.

“The Shanars, as a class, observed their Lordship of the High Court in their Judgement, “have from time immemorial been devoted to the cultivation of the palmyra palm and to the collection of its juice and the manufacture of liquor from it. Their own local traditions connect them with the toddy drawers of Ceylon whence the Tiyans or toddy drawers of the West Coast, are also supposed to have immigrated. There are no grounds whatever for regarding them as of Aryan origin. Their worship was a sort of demonology and their position in general social estimation appears to have been just above Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans and below that of Vellalans, Maravans and other cultivating castes usually classed as Sudras and admittedly free to worship in the Hindu temples”.<sup>114</sup>

Madras high court Judge stated that about Kamudi temple entry case “all Nadars are Shanar by caste: unless, indeed they have abandoned Caste as many of them have by becoming Christians”.<sup>115</sup> The economic and social progress of the Shanans was the major reason to oppose and made this kind of group of struggle against higher castes. As a result, the Shanans built separate temples for themselves and they planned to settle separately. Sivakasi was the main settlement of Shanans. Ultimately, they felt that Hinduism did not give them social respect. Socially discriminated by Hinduism, they converted to Christianity where they seemingly got social respect and equality, somewhat better than what Hinduism gave them.

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<sup>114</sup> Chidambaram Pillai, *Right of Temple Entry*, 206-212.

<sup>115</sup> Chidambaram Pillai, *Right of Temple Entry*, 212.

## 10. The part played by the Zamindar of Ramnad in the Caste Conflict

The Zamindar of Ramnad played an essential role in the maintenance of the social order in his estate. In the case of caste conflict between Maravans and Shanans, the Zamindars backed the Maravans as he belonged to same caste group. According to Robert Hardgrave, there was a popular rumour that the local Maravar Zamindars backed the rioting Maravans with money and Guns. A report in the Hindu newspaper even suggested that the riot was inspired by the Raja of Ramnad to put pressure on the Court to decide in his favour against the Shanans' claim to temple entry in Kamudi. However the Raja had issued the following statement: "I possess friends among Nadar Community," and "I am no bigot but a practical sympathizer of lower castes and foreign religions..."<sup>116</sup> The Maravans wanted to maintain the status quo in with regard to their status in the social hierarchical order. The Shanans were desirous of constructing a new social order based on their newly acquired economic wealth. In this conflict the Zamindar of Ramnad always stood beside the landowning caste of Maravans, Reddies, Nayakkans and Chetties in an attempt to retain their support. The Shanans, Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans were considered below these landowning castes, whom the landed groups wanted to maintain under their control. The emergence of Shanans under the banner of Christianity was not tolerated by the landowning caste groups, especially the Maravans. They were afraid of the loss of their status in the social hierarchy. Therefore, Maravans opposed Shanans whenever they got the opportunity. In their attempt, they were backed by the Zamindar of Ramnad who depended on the landowning caste groups in

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<sup>116</sup> *The Hindu*, June 28, 1899, cited in Hardgrave, 118-119.



sustaining his social influence and economic power. Therefore, the Zamindar supported land owning caste groups in the upper caste resistance to Shanans' temple entry. Apart from the Shanans, the rest of the oppressed caste groups like Pallan, Paraiyan and Chakkiliyans could not afford to oppose the Maravans during the nineteenth century owing to their dependence on the landowning groups for their existence and survival. Further, socially Zamin Maravans guarded their social supremacy and kept the landless castes always below them.

## **11. Overview**

The socio-economic status of communities in the southern Tamil country was constructed and structuralised based on land owning and wealth. The nineteenth century witnessed changes that occurred in the social and economic order in the Ramnad Zamindari. The society was preominated by the rich agricultural castes like Maravans, Reddies, Vellalans and Nayakkans, among the agricultural landowning groups, Maravans were faced economic crisis during the second half of nineteenth century. On the other hand, Shanans of Ramnad emerged as a wealthy community through their trading activities. The abolition of Kaval system deprived the non-zamin landowning Maravans of income as their source of income was through the village watch fee in the agrarian society. It was the main reason for the social and economic problems of Maravans in the Ramnad Zamindari. The zamin Maravans faced great economic issues of tax arrears and loan burden from government and indebtedness to private money lenders especially the Nattukottai Chetties. The luxurious life style, charitable grants, unnecessary expenses, grand festival and marriage celebrations increased

their loan and thus the debt burden of the Ramnad Zamindari. These causes pushed Ramnad Zamindars to lease and mortgage their zamin villages to private moneylenders or Nattukottai chetties. The second half of nineteenth century the economic problems of the Ramnad Zamindari and other non-zamin Maravans' paved the way for the emergence of new landowning social groups, namely the Nattukottai Chetties who were traditionally bankers and moneylenders.

During this period the economic problems of the Zamin of Ramnad was the major reason behind the transformation of Nattukottai chetties from moneylenders to landowning groups. On the other hand, the Shanans of Ramnad progressed economically and claimed equal status with landowning agricultural castes of Maravans and others. The social imbalance and caste discrimination in the Ramnad society pushed the oppressed caste groups to convert to Christianity. They hoped, under the banner of Christianity, to get equal status in the social order. The conversion of Paravans, Shanans, Paraiyans, Pallans of the socially oppressed caste groups seriously affected the social balance prevailing in the society.

The religious conversion and economic transformation was the fundamental root for the caste conflict between Maravans and Shanans in the nineteenth century. The progress and emergence of Shanans was greatly disturbed the social order in which Maravans were higher to the Shanans in the social hierarchy. Deprived of income and economic status, the Maravans tried to prevent the progress of Shanans with the support of other social groups like the Pallans and trading Muslims whenever needed. But their intention was not fulfilled. The Shanans came forward and claimed equal status and honour along

with the Maravans and other landowning caste groups through the Hindu temple entry struggle. The second half of the nineteenth century the Shanans formed the *Mahimai* and the *Uravinmurai* and achieved solidarity against the discriminatory practices prevalent in the southern Tamil country. Their resistance and temple entry struggle led to communal riots between Shanans and Maravans during the second half of nineteenth century. Kalugumalai Riot of 1895 and Sivakasi riot 1899 of Tinnevely district and Kamudi riot of 1899 in Ramnad zamindari were the result of a major caste conflict between the Shanans and Maravans in the nineteenth century. These three riots occurred when Shanans tried to enter Hindu temples, entry into which was prohibited by social dominated caste groups. The Temple entry struggle of Shanans was not simply to get the right to enter the Hindu temple. It symbolized their struggle for getting equal social honour and status along with other landowning caste groups. In this struggle Shanans proved their strength and they were the only community to resist against the discriminatory practises caste Hindus who were the dominated social groups in the nineteenth century. The economic changes and transformation played a vital role in the constructing the social structure in the southern Tamil country.

## Conclusion

The formation of the Vijayanagar Empire in the southern Tamil country occurred in the first half of the fourteenth century. Nayaks were appointed to Madura as the Empire's representatives. Visvanatha Nayak (1529-64) is considered as the founder of the Nayak rule of Madura. Apart from Madura, Tanjore, Senji and Vellore were tributaries of Vijayanagara Empire. Visvanatha Nayak was the organiser of Poligari or *Palayakarar* system in the Madura country. He divided his territory into seventy-two *palayams* for the purpose of getting cooperation from local chieftains, who belonged to different communities. Among the seventy-two bastions Ramnad was the largest one and the ruler of Ramnad emerged as the chief of all the *Palayakarars*. Though systems similar to the Poligari had been reported in southern India, the local systems are not clearly evidenced. By general consensus among scholars Visvanatha Nayak was the initiator of the Poligari system in the southern Tamil country.

The decline of the Mughal Empire in northern India after the death of Aurangzeb (1707) created a political turmoil in southern India. The representatives of the Mughal rulers declared themselves independent sovereign rulers of their respective domains. Among them, Chanda Sahib, one of the tributaries of the Mughals, declared himself the autonomous ruler of the Carnatic provinces. The internal disputes and disturbances in the court of the Madura Nayaks set Chanda Sahib's eyes on the Madura kingdom in 1736. The weakness of the Nayaks of Madura, made the local chieftains under Madura Kingdom proclaim themselves as

independent rulers. They refused to accept the supremacy of Madura Nayaks. After the suicide of Rani Minakshi (1736), the last Nayak ruler of Madura, began the decline and fall of Madura Nayaks. This situation paved the way for Muslim rule under Chanda Sahib, the Navayat Nawab of Carnatic, who entered the Madura country. Muhammad Ali Walaja, Chanda Sahib's rival, became the Nawab of Carnatic region in 1755 with the help of the British. Poor administration and great financial debts made his inevitable tie-up with the Company, and ultimately he lost his territory to the Europeans.

The treaty of Allahabad was made between Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II and the Company on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1765. It granted *Diwani right* to the Company for collecting land revenue from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The second half of the eighteenth century, witnessed the process whereby the Company changed into an administrator of India. In this circumstance, the Nawab's poor administration and debt burden forced him to make an agreement with the Company for finance. Nawab and the Company's agreements of 1781 and 1792 played a major role in the Company's establishment of administration in the Carnatic region. The emergence and strength of Ramnad Setupathis turned the Company's attention towards the Marava ruler. The rise of the Maravas encouraged the southern poligars to oppose the Company and the Nawab's rule. Therefore, the Nawab and the Company made an alliance and tried to suppress the chief Poligar of Ramnad. Ultimately in 1795, the Company captured Ramnad and brought it under their control. The transformation of the Company's role from that of a merchant Company to a political agent and bureaucratic power in southern India occurred in the beginning of the nineteenth century (1801). After their entry and establishment of power in Ramnad, the

Company began its activities to get regular land revenue from Ramnad. Therefore, the Company tried for a permanent settlement in the Madras Presidency based on the model of the Bengal Presidency. In 1802, the permanent or Zamindari land tenure was introduced in the District of Chingleput and the rest of the districts followed afterwards. The treaty of Allahabad made the Company the administrator of the Bengal region. The treaties of 1781 and 1792 made the Company political administrator of the Carnatic region.

The formation of Ramnad Kingdom occurred in the beginning of the seventeenth century (A.D 1605). There is no clear evidence to ascertain the beginning of the rule of Setupathis of Ramnad. Sadaika Tevar was appointed as the protector of pilgrims to and from Rameswaram. He was considered the first ruler of Ramnad Kingdom. The weakness of Madura Nayaks caused the emergence of Setupathis as powerful rulers in the southern Tamil country. During the period of the treaties of 1781 and 1792 Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1782-95) was the ruler of Ramnad. He defied the dominance of the Nawab and the Company. The powerful status of the Ramnad Maravas as rulers of Ramnad distressed the British policy of expansion towards the southern Tamil country. Between 1792 and 1795, resistance rose against the Company under the Marava ruler Muthuramalinga Setupathi I; he was called 'rebel' Muthuramalinga Setupathi I by the Company. After the suppression of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I, it kept him at Trichinopoly as prisoner and later transferred him to Madras. Eventually he passed away. The suppression of the poligari wars (1799) of southern Tamil country in the end of eighteenth century gave the Company the ultimate control of southern Tamil country. As a result, the entire southern Tamil country came under the direct control of the Company. The beginning

of nineteenth century saw the Company suppress the poligars and their opposition: poligars were converted to Zamindars and *palayams* were changed to Zamindari or estate. After the suppression of Poligari resistance, poligars were forced to accept the Company's supremacy. The Poligars were redesignated and reduced to Zamindars without political power, or the status of a 'hollow crown'.

Before the Zamindari settlement, local chieftains played the role of sovereign rulers over their Kingdoms. The ruler of the kingdom was the ultimate power who had maintained political, economic and social legitimacy over his territory. The Vellalans, Reddies and Maravans had supreme positions in the social order. On the other hand, Shanans were placed in the second stage. They considered themselves superior to Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. The Maravans were considered superior to Kallans and Agambadians. Later these three communities together were called *Mukkulathor* in the twentieth century. Agambadians were servants in the Zamindar's palace and Kallans were soldiers. Parts of them were entertained in agricultural activities. The Rajus community worked guardians of queen's quarters of Ramnad Zamindars.

The earlier social structure changed after the introduction of the permanent settlement in Ramnad. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed great changes of political and social stratification in the southern Tamil country owing to the British economic policy. In 1802 the entire southern Tamil country came under the direct control of the Company and converted the assigned poligars to Zamindars or landlords of their respective *palayams*, and *palayams* changed into Zamindari or estate. The local chieftains were redesignated Zamindars without military force or

political power. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the circumstance of political turmoil greatly changed the poligars into Zamindar and their *palayams* into Zamindari. Ramnad was converted from a Little Kingdom to Zamindari in the beginning of nineteenth century (1803). The introduction of Zamindari settlement in the southern Tamil country was a milestone in the history of southern Tamil country. The status of little kingdoms was reduced politically and economically. The Zamindars of respective Zamindaris became revenue collectors and representatives of the Company. The Zamindari system changed the economical and social hierarchical order of the Ramnad society. The settlement made dynamic changes in the agriculture order. This system created social imbalance in the Ramnad society, based on land holding and land owning.

Rani Mangaleswari Nachiyar (sister of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I) was recognised as Zamindarini of Ramnad under the control of the Company. In the eighteenth century, local chieftains maintained supreme role in their respective *palayams*. After the introduction of Zamindari settlement, the Company, with supervision of the Zamindars, tried different kinds of lease system to collect land revenue such as *kattukuthagai* (lease), *amani* (1793-1793), *village lease* (1808-09), *decennial lease* (1811) and *olungu* (1821). During the nineteenth century, in the Madras Presidency, out of 90 million acres of cultivable area, 27½ million acres was held by 849 Zamindars. Among them fifteen Zamindars held 6¾ million acres. They were paying around two lakh rupees as *peshcush* to the government. 128 Zamindars held 9½ millions of acres; they paid regularly a *peshcush* amount of 18,100 rupees to the government. 706 Zamindars and *mittadars* held 2¾ million acres and paid a *peshcush* amount of 1,300 rupees to the government annually. A million acres of land



was under the Zamindar system in Madura, North Arcot and Salem Districts. By the end of the nineteenth century, in Madras, an estimated 804 Zamindars controlled 40 per cent of the land. The remaining 60 percent was under Ryotwari tenure.

The introduction of Zamindari tenure in 1803 created a new social ladder in Ramnad. The British government placed on top of the ladder; Zamindars were in the second place; Mirasidars or tenants were third; peasants or sub-tenants were fourth; and lastly were landless and marginalised labourers. After the implementation of the permanent settlement, Zamindars were considered landowners. Zamindars leased land to mirasidars for certain periods and collected fixed rents for the land. Ramnad Zamindari belonged to Maravan community. Apart from the royal family, most of the Maravans were mirasidars and some of them were agricultural labourers. The mirasidars were from Vellalan, Maravan, Reddi, Nayakkan, Raju and Agambadian castes. Most of the sub-tenants or landless labourers were Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkilians, who chiefly served as *pannayal* and *padiyal* in the Vellalan's land. The permanent settlement created two major divisions in the social hierarchy based on the ownership of land such as land-owning groups and landless groups in Ramnad Zamindari. Landownership decided a specific community's social status in the hierarchical order. The Shanans of Ramnad were considered as traders, while in Tinnevely, they were known as *marameri* or toddy tappers. They migrated to Ramnad as traders. Shanans considered themselves above Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans of Ramnad.

Zamindars followed different methods of assessment while collecting land rent for *nanjai* and *punjai* lands. They appointed *karnams* and other officers to collect

land revenue from mirasidars and ryots. The British government, Zamindars and mirasidars were keenly interested in collecting more income from the land; therefore they used rigid methods to collect the share of the produce from the peasants. The peasants and landless labourers always struggled to survive the suppression by Zamindars and mirasidars. The Zamindars used different kinds of land assessment to collect revenue based on the nature of soil. The land rent or tax was fixed and the ryots could pay their land rent in six or seven instalments. In case of drought or famine, ryots were exempted from the current year payment; they should pay that amount in the next year as arrears to Zamindars or mirasidars. The internal disputes of the Zamindars of Ramnad, their litigations and heavy tax arrears and debt burdens led to the collapse of the administration of Ramnad Zamindari.

The *karnams*' and other government officials' mismanagement and malpractices reflected the degradation of entire land revenue administration and peasant lifestyle. The increase of land tax and heavy debt burden paved the way for new elite groups, based on the agrarian crisis. The imposition of new taxes and heavy tax burden pushed the peasants to borrow more money from money lending communities. Lack of maintaining irrigation sources, Zamindar's litigations and heavy debts led the peasants to sell or mortgage the land to money lending community or Nattukottai chetties. The Nattukootai chetties of Ramnad were initially traders; gradually they developed into bankers for rulers and peasants. Ultimately they had a supreme position in the social structure. In the second half of nineteenth century they became landowners through money-lending. The Zamindar's inattention, internal problems and litigations among royal family members paved the way for neglect of the irrigation sources. As a consequence, artificial and unavoidable famine,

starvation and draught took place in Ramnad Zamindari during the period of 1876-78. The commercialisation of agriculture was the root cause of the famine of the second half of the nineteenth century. Zamindar's ignorance and mismanagement and unskilled village officials lead to the ryots' heavy tax burden, leading to great changes in Ramnad. These causes led to the selling or mortgage of land which initiated the formation of a new social group from among the Nattukottai chetties. The Zamindars loan dues made them lease several villages to chetties in compensation for the loan amount. During the second half of nineteenth century, the Nattukottai chetties became landowners of Ramnad Zamindari from being bankers.

The economic crisis and the Zamindars mismanagement were the major causes for the migration of common people and social inequality based on landowning. There were communal conflicts and religious conversions in the Ramnad Zamindari. The land transformation from Maravan communities to Natukottai chetties happened during the period of the second half of nineteenth century. Maravans were mostly affected by heavy debt burdens, because apart from the royal Maravans, others mostly depended on agricultural field. But after the famine of 1876-78, Maravans could not continue their agricultural production due to the loan burden. Thus the major reason behind the sale of their lands was over-debt. The rest of the landowning groups such as Vellalans, Reddies, Nayakkans and Rajus were rich and could continue their agrarian production without any financial problems. The landless labourers (*pannaya* and *padiyal*) Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans always depended on landowning groups and struggled to survive being constantly oppressed by landowning communities. These social imbalances flourished and were well-established under the provision of land owning and holding rights.

Before the entry of the British, Indian society had common ownership of land or was under the control of local chieftains. The colonial society was constructed based on the nature of landowning, which decided one's position in the social strata. The Shanans of Ramnad who were transformed from *marameri* to traders tried claiming equal status with the landowning caste of Maravans. But they always kept away from Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans, who were considered of lower status than them. Shanans' homeland was Tiruchendur of Tinnevely district where they were known as *marameri* or toddy tappers. They migrated to Ramnad as traders. The Shanans developed well economically on the basis of their trading activities. After attaining wealth, they started to resist the oppression of so-called caste Hindus. The progress and development of Shanans disturbed landowning castes especially Maravans of Ramnad who always wanted to maintain Shanans, Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans under their dominance. That was why the Marava ruler of Ramnad denied the Shanans entry to Hindu temples which were under their control. Consequently, social inequality in the social structure of Ramnad Zamindari pushed the Shanans to conversion to Christianity, which offered equal status and honour in the social order. The serious debt burden forced the people to migrate to other territories for basic needs and survival.

Whenever Ramnad Zamindari faced litigation issues, minority issues of Zamindar's heir or issues of adoption of Zamindars, the government appointed a Court of Wards to manage the estate issues. In this case, Ramnad Zamindari was under the control of the Court of Wards for twenty-one years (1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889). Whereas peasants faced several problems and were treated badly under the control of Zamindars, under the control of Court of Wards,

peasants' condition was not that bad and ryots' problems were solved under the supervision of the Court of Wards.

The ryots of Ramnad Zamindari faced difficulties from both the management of Zamindars and the Court of wards. Because both of them were intent on more revenue from ryots without considering the welfare of the ryots. The government made a new act to collect more land revenue and Zamindars were the tools of the government to implement it. The government's economic policy in Ramnad Zamindari was only to get more and regular income from the agrarian sector. They considered the cultivators as promoters of their wealth. So they wanted to save them by enacting legislations and protecting them legally from the Zamindar or government officers. Ultimately, whether it is the Zamindar's rule or the government reign, peasant groups suffered and struggled for survival in the Ramnad Zamindari. There were some wealthy peasants who filed suits against the Zamindars to oppose their occupation of land and their rate of assessment in the second half of the nineteenth century. Peasants could not be successful in their revenue suits because of the power and influence of Zamindars. In the nineteenth century the circumstances created new kinds of elite groups in the southern Tamil society such as money lenders. Giving to their influence land right was transformed from cultivators to wealthy groups. As a result, the condition and life of the peasant was fully pathetic. The economic growth and development of new social elites made dynamic changes in the social order, thus leading the way to social conflicts in the nineteenth century.

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## *Glossary*

<i>Adimai</i>	: slave, bonded labours
<i>Agambadiyan</i>	: a warrior caste allied with the Maravans, and served in the palace of the Setupathi.
<i>Amani</i>	: the collection of the revenue direct from the cultivators by the officers of the government
<i>Ambalagar</i>	: one who held an ambalam share, in village resources; the headman of a village
<i>Ambalam</i>	: a share in village resources held by a dominant family in a village
<i>Amildar</i>	: revenue collector
<i>Amin</i>	: an official in the Samastanam revenue establishment
<i>Ayan</i>	: villages which were not the personal property of the raja and were not gifted or leased and which paid taxes directly to the Samastanam revenue establishment.
<i>Betel</i>	: a nut from a palm tree which is chewed for its pleasing effects
<i>Chattram/ Choultry</i>	: a house of rest and nourishment for pilgrims
<i>Chetti</i>	: merchant caste
<i>Circar</i>	: government
<i>Cowle</i>	: the document granted by the Collector, proprietor, or receiver of revenue to the subordinate payer of the revenue, or the actual cultivator, stating the terms of the agreement and the amount to be paid, and securing him against further demands; it frequently implies also that the contract or lease is granted on favourable conditions, as in the case of the cultivation of waste lands, for which a remission of rent is granted for a given period by a cowle.
<i>Cutcherry</i>	: court of Justice, also the public office where the rents are paid. and other business, respecting the revenue, transacted
<i>Devastanam</i>	: a place or establishment of temple management
<i>Dharmakarta</i>	: the protector of a temple
<i>Dharmamakamai</i>	: a small tax collected by the raja for religious projects and patronage
<i>Dharmasanam</i>	: a gift of religious charity
<i>Fanam</i>	: a coin
<i>Fasli</i>	: revenue or harvest era beginning from 590 A.D. it is calculated from July to June
<i>Gramani</i>	: toddy-tapping caste of northern Tamil country
<i>Inam</i>	: a gift/ land granted for services free of tax
<i>Inamdars</i>	: holder of Inam lands
<i>Istimirar sunnud</i>	: the grant of a Zamindari under the colonial regime
<i>Jagir</i>	: assignment of revenue, service tenure
<i>Jagirdar</i>	: holder of <i>Jagir</i> land
<i>Jamabandi</i>	: annual settlement of revenue with cultivators.
<i>Kalam</i>	: a dry measure, equal to 12 marakkals
<i>Kalappichchai</i>	: alms at the threshing floor measured
<i>Kalingal</i>	: a stone facing or embankment for keeping the water of a reservoir

<i>Kallan</i>	: a caste in southern Tamil country
<i>Kanmai</i>	: a tank
<i>Kannars</i>	: canal or block
<i>Karisal</i>	: a black cotton ground, free from stones and sand
<i>Karnam</i>	: village officer
<i>Kist</i>	: installment of land revenue or rent
<i>Konar</i>	: shepherd caste
<i>Kottai</i>	: a measure of grains varying in different places from 21 to 24 marakkals.
<i>Kudivaram</i>	: peasant's share from land produce
<i>Kulavattu</i>	: a tax for maintaining tanks and other irrigation work
<i>Kuruvai</i>	: rice crop harvested in October
<i>Kuthagai</i>	: land leased for rent in cash
<i>Lakh</i>	: one hundred thousand, written often as 1,00,000
<i>Mahamai</i>	: common fund or village fund
<i>Mahanam</i>	: the smallest revenue division
<i>Mamool</i>	: also known as <i>custom</i> , the share of the Poligar
<i>Mandalam</i>	: territorial division
<i>Mandapam</i>	: an open pavilion where religious rituals and ceremonies are performed
<i>Maniyakar</i>	: revenue official
<i>Maniyam</i>	: tax free grant
<i>Marakkal</i>	: a grain measure contains 8 padis or measures and being one-twelfth of a kalam.
<i>Marameri</i>	: tree climbers
<i>Maravan</i>	: warrior caste of southern districts
<i>Mariyathai</i>	: courtesies, respect or status of honor
<i>Melvaram</i>	: share of the produce due to the landlord or the State
<i>Milkiat-istimirar</i>	: proprietary right or possession in perpetuity
<i>Mirasi</i>	: form of right in land, inheritance; inherited property or right
<i>Mirasidar</i>	: holder of <i>mirasi</i> land
<i>Mottafaisal</i>	: a system with lump sum assessment not liable to variation according to current prices.
<i>Moturpha</i>	: a tax on trades
<i>Muchilikka</i>	: legal tie-up of landholders or tenants and Zamindars
<i>Mukkulators</i>	: the three allied castes, Maravans, Kallans and Agambadiyans
<i>Nattamgar</i>	: a village headman
<i>Nanjai</i>	: wet land cultivation
<i>Nattanmakaran</i>	: chief or head man of a village or district
<i>Nattar</i>	: a bigman in an area; properly, the head of a <i>natu</i> domain.
<i>Natu</i>	: a rural domain, for example, the area controlled by a clan
<i>Navaratri</i>	: a Hindu festival celebrated for nine nights before <i>Vijaya Dasami</i>
<i>Nayakkan</i>	: a caste consisting of Telugu migrants to the Tamil country.
<i>Neerurimai</i>	: water rights
<i>Nilavari</i>	: land tax
<i>Nirppacci</i>	: water turner in agricultural field

<i>Oorani</i>	: drinking-water ponds
<i>Padakanikai</i>	: a present placed at the feet of Zamindar or landlord by ryots
<i>Padi</i>	: fixed daily allowance
<i>Padiyal</i>	: hired laborers who lived outside the village and got wages in kind
<i>Pagoda</i>	: unit of money, a gold coin equivalent to 3½ rupees
<i>Paisa</i>	: a small unit of money; one twelfth of an anna
<i>Palaiyakkarar</i>	: the chief of a domain with military powers
<i>Palankatchi</i>	: a present made to the Zamindar by ryot on dry crops
<i>Palayam</i>	: a military domain, armed camp
<i>Pallacheri</i>	: settlement place of Pallans
<i>Pallans</i>	: agricultural labour caste in the Tamil Country
<i>Panaiyeri</i>	: climber of palm tree
<i>Pandal</i>	: roof
<i>Pannai</i>	: a system in which the mirasidar himself cultivated the land with the assistance of pannaiyals
<i>Pannai</i>	: farming house
<i>Pannaiyal</i>	: farm laborer, serf
<i>Pannaiyal</i>	: laborers who lived within the limits of village
<i>Paraicheri</i>	: settlement place of Paraiyans
<i>Paraiyan</i>	: agricultural labour caste in the Tamil country
<i>Parakudi</i>	: Tenant not residing in the village
<i>Patta</i>	: an official document given to occupants of land showing the terms of the lease
<i>Pattadar</i>	: holder of a <i>patta</i>
<i>Payakari</i>	: Tenant; share cropper
<i>Peshcush</i>	: fixed revenue paid to government by the Zamindar
<i>Pettai</i>	: fortified enclosure
<i>Pisanam</i>	: a variety of paddy
<i>Poligar</i>	: holder of a <i>palayam</i> or a chieftain or head of a tract of country
<i>Polithalli</i>	: village harvesting officer
<i>Pollam</i>	: properly known as <i>palayam</i> , a area of Zamindar
<i>Poruppu</i>	: the “responsibility” or revenue due the king
<i>Potuchilavu</i>	: public expense
<i>Pradani</i>	: a minister
<i>Punjai</i>	: dry land cultivation
<i>Raja</i>	: a king
<i>Rani</i>	: a queen
<i>Reddiars</i>	: caste of Telugu migrants from Andra.
<i>Ryot</i>	: peasant, tenant or sub-tenants of land cultivation
<i>Ryotwari</i>	: a land system under which assessments engaged with directly on individual land holdings.
<i>Samasthanam</i>	: a zamindari kingdom
<i>Sarasari tax</i>	: average tax
<i>Servaikaran</i>	: title of Agambadiyan caste
<i>Setupathi</i>	: guardians of the cause-way to Rameswaram



<i>Sunnud</i>	: a grant of land giving the terms of the grant, a title deed, a patron of appointment to grant title, dignity or office.
<i>Swamibogam</i>	: proprietors or landlords' share
<i>Swantantram</i>	: fee or perquisites claimable by a proprietor from a cultivator of proprietary land
<i>Swarnadeyam</i>	: rent or revenue collected in cash
<i>Tahsildar</i>	: the administrative head of a taluk
<i>Taluk</i>	: a revenue division
<i>Talukdar</i>	: head of taluk
<i>Tank</i>	: a pond or lake for storing water
<i>Tevar</i>	: maravans title
<i>Tirva</i>	: money assessment on land revenue
<i>Ulkudi</i>	: share cropper with occupancy right; resident tenant
<i>Umbalavari</i>	: tax collected from government officials
<i>Uravinmurai</i>	: local shanan community organization
<i>Vaikkolvari</i>	: straw tax
<i>Vanpayir</i>	: land grown with garden crops like tobacco or betel
<i>Varam</i>	: share of the crop or of the produce of a field
<i>Vellalans</i>	: landowning caste
<i>Zamindar</i>	: a land holder; holder of Zamindari
<i>Zamindarini</i>	: a female Zamindar
<i>Zenana</i>	: the section of a house where the women lived, in seclusion or semi-seclusion.