

CHAPTER – I

THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF SETHUPATHIES

The origin of the Sethupathies, the chief of the Maravas has been eluding the grasp of research scholars. According to the legend, Rama built a temple at Rameshwaram in order to expiate the sin of *Brahmahati* in slaying Ravana, left the hereditary charge of it and the superintendence of the pilgrimage to the chief of a tribe of Maravas belonging to the village of Pogalur.¹ Thus the legend speaks of the creation of the Sethupathies long before the birth of Christ. This story only suggests that the Sethupathies had a hoary past dating back to 11th or 12th century BC.² According to the rise of the family it took place in or about AD 1059, when Raja Raja I, the Chola king upon his invasion of Ceylon appointed his man to act as the guardian of the Setu embankment who thus became the founder of the line of the Sethupathis.³ But the Pandyas when they regained their suzerainty over Madurai were in a position to control Ramanathapuram also. Inscriptions⁴ of the later Pandyan kings have been found in the Ramanathapuram province and these prove beyond a shadow of doubt the mastery of Ramanathapuram also by the Pandyas. Thus it seems that the Sethupathis could not have been the rulers of the Ramanathapuram province from the time of Raja Raja I.

According to the other theory which has its source in Sinhalese records the family came into existence from the appointment of Parakrama Bahu's general Lankapura Danda Nayaka who according to the Mahavamsa after conquering the Pandyas remained sometime at Rameshwaram building a temple there and that he struck the Sinhalese coins and from this it is stated that the Sethupathis were the descendants'

¹ Pharoah and Co., *Gazetteer of South India*, vol. II, Madras, 1855, p. 392.

² S. Natarajan, *History of the Setupathis of Ramnad*, Unpublished thesis, Annamalai University 1935, p. 8.

³ Rev. James Tracy, *The Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, Vol. VI, Madras, 1835, p. 2.

⁴ V. Rangachari, *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. II, Govt. Press, Madras, 1919, p. 109.

of the men appointed by Parakrama Bahu's general. This theory too cannot be accepted for already stated reason.⁵

Again Kailayamalai by Muthurasa Kavirayar, a Tamil work of about 15th century mention that an Arya king of Jaffna got from Rameshwaram some Brahmins learned in Vedas to officiate as priests in the newly built temple at Nellur through the help of the Sethupathi. This proves that the Sethupathis were real masters of Ramanathapuram even before the 15th century.⁶

Amongst the last of the seven groups of Marava called Sempu Nattu Maravas were ruled this country with the title of Sethupathi.⁷ They were the guardians of the "Sethu Bridge". So they were named as Sethupathi. They belonged to Marava caste. They were brought from the village of pogalure near Ramanathapuram. The region ruled by Sethupathi was known as Marava. The Marava country consisted of present district of Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai and a part of Tirunelveli.

The devotees from the north who used to flock every year in thousands to Rameshwaram were daily petitioning to the Governor and clamoring for the restoration of the country to a Marava prince entitled Sadaika Thevar Udaiyan Sethupathi who alone, it was believed, could keep the country in order and protect pilgrims and travelers from plunder and rapine.⁸ The Nayaks had neglected the coastal regions for a considerable length of time. The political confusion after the battle of Talaikotta helped the Portuguese missionaries make much progress in their proselytisation activities and they had firmly established themselves there. Fr Peter Martin in one of his letters says: "when the Portuguese first came to India, the Paravas or the inhabitants of the fishing

⁵ Sewell, Robert – *A Sketch of Dynasties of South India*, Cosmo publications, Delhi, 1932, p. 87.

⁶ V. Rangachari, *op.cit*, pp. 111-112.

⁷ *Military consultations Madras*, 13th Feb, 1755, vol.4, p.24.

⁸ J.H. Nelson, *Madura country*, Part III C.I.S. Publication, Madras, 1868, p. 109.

coast groaned under the government of the Moors who had seized upon that part of the kingdom of Madurai. In this extremity their chief resolved to implore the assistance of the Portuguese and to put himself with the whole castle under their protection. The Portuguese who have always been vastly zealous for the establishment of the Christian religion indulged in it upon the condition that they should turn Christians the Paravas promised. This treaty was no sooner concluded than the Portuguese drove the moors out of the whole country and settled themselves in various places.⁹ Gradually they made themselves masters over the Paravas. They now aimed at political supremacy also. Their contention was that the Paravas by changing their religion had changed their nationality also. Francis Xavier in one of his letters called the Paravas subjects of 'his Portuguese majesty nothing can be more evident from all the letters written by Francis Xavier and others during their stay that the entire civil and criminal jurisdiction of the fishery coast had been seized upon by the Portuguese and that all the dues and taxes including the valuable revenue arising from the pearl fishery had been assumed by governors appointed by the Portuguese viceroy. The Portuguese had not asked any consent to the formation of their settlements. They seized possession of the whole fishery coast.

Established settlements wherever they pleased and conferred on the Paravas the somewhat dangerous privilege of being Portuguese subjects.¹⁰ They gradually increased in power and in a short time the Portuguese possessions on the Coromandel Coast extended as far as Rameshwaram. They also built a mud fort at Vadalai village in Rameshwaram and put up a garrison there. This increase in their power made them proud and in AD 1549, one Joao Fernandes Corria, the Commander of the garrison dug a trench close to his fort and blocked the way of the numerous pilgrims going to

⁹ Lockman, *Travels of the Jesuits*, Vol. I, John Noon, London, 1762, pp. 375-376.

¹⁰ Robert Caldwell, *History of Tirunelvely*, Jetley, Madras, 1881, p. 71.

Rameshwaram. It is said that they even forced the pilgrims to pay a heavy toll.¹¹ This was some proof of the potentialities of Portuguese rapacity.

Again two events occurred in Muthu Krishnappa's reign which made prompt action necessary. The Palayakara of the neighborhood called in the Jesuit records 'King of Tuticorin' raided the Parava reigns on their failure to comply with his demands of tribute due to him and sacked the town. The infuriated Paravas demanded some amends but the chief turned a deaf ear. The Paravas then abandoned their city and proceeded to a little island, built a fortification round it and settled there.¹² So the Nayak could not be blind to this.

Another event followed which increased the wrath of the Nayak. The Palayakara of Vigiabadi (Vijayapati) named Ariya Perumal was oppressing the Paravas who inhabited the tract between Cape Comorin and Manapadu. One night the Paravas took the chief by surprise, attacked him and killed him despite his repeated requests to be spared. Muthu Krishnappa could not be a silent spectator. He imposed a heavy fine upon the inhabitants and sent an army to collect it. On the refusal of the inhabitants to pay the stipulated sum, the general ordered his army to attack them. On hearing this Portuguese captain of the Gulf of Mannars proceeded to the shores of Tuticorin and attacked the Hindu temple built near the city. This had the desired effect. The devotees pressed for negotiations and the Nayak had to give up the punitive expedition.¹³

These events proved conclusively that all was not well on the fishery coast. The 'open door' policy of the Nayaks had contributed to the strengthening of the position of the Portuguese. The Paravas backed up by the Portuguese could grow into a militant race. The boldness exhibited by their dealing with the Tuticorin king and Ariya Perumal

¹¹ Fr Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, Vol. I, G.Paul & Co, Madras, 1927, p. 157.

¹² Lockman, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 352-354.

showed that if left unchecked the Paravas under Portuguese influence could be a menace to the Madurai kingdom.

The Portuguese again were not willing to give up the position gained. When the Portuguese king was informed of the doings of the Nayaks, he wrote to his viceroy recommending him to help those Christians as much as possible and to employ all means to hinder the said Nayak from making rich extortions any more.¹⁴

Muthu Krishnappa, realizing the possible dangers of the Portuguese policy in the Marava regions set up the Sethupathi at Ramanathapuram to counteract the Portuguese activities. Again Muthu Krishnappa would have thought of making Ramanathapuram a military out-post because of frequent invasions to and from Ceylon. It could also be used as the base of action against the possible rebellions of the poligars of the farther south. Further the Maravas were a fierce and warlike race and would form excellent material for a powerful army. It is already seen that the Marava country was divided into sixes or seven division, that taxes could not be collected regularly and that the Portuguese had appropriated for themselves a part of the revenue thereby dwindling the revenues for the Nayak. This also had compelled the Madurai Nayak to restore the Sethupathis.

Thus political confusion, financial stringency and military consideration should have convinced Muthu Krishnappa to take up the bold task of firmly establishing the Sethupathi at Ramanathapuram. Further it is said that the countless pilgrims who frequently resorted to the most famous temple at Rameshwaram found the roads unsafe and the journey very risky. People petitioned to the Madurai Nayak requesting him to clear the tracts and establish order. It is said that Muthu Krishnappa in compliance with the request of the pilgrims made Sadaika Thevar Udaiyan Sethupathi over the tract and entrusted him with the task of establishing peace and help the pilgrims.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 354.

It is clear from the account of the chronicles that Muthu Krishnappa restored Sadaiya Theva Udaiyan Sethupathi only after testing his capacity to deal effectively with the situation in the Marava country.¹⁵ It seems that the latter was allowed a free hand on agreeing to pay a fixed tribute. At first he appears to have made the passage to Rameshwaram safe by fortifying Ramanathapuram and pogalur, escorting the pilgrims and subduing the turbulent chiefs. Then Muthu Krishnappa sent for him and invested him with the title of Sethupathi or chief of Sethu, bestowing on him elephants and horses with vestments and ornaments, and also gave him some banners or ensigns of dignity and in Madurai had him consecrated to his viceroyalty by the sprinkling of the water of the Ganges.¹⁶ According to the chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis, this ceremony took place in 1605 AD.¹⁷ This might be correct as one find that the earliest inscription of Udaiyan Sethupathi is dated in 1607 AD.¹⁸

Sadaika Thevar Udaiyan Sethupathi (1605-1622 AD)

Sadaika Thevar Udaiyan Sethupathi was a man of energy and conduct, and soon gave the Governor cause to congratulate him on having acted as he wished. He reclaimed the waste-lands. He checked robbery and violence. He fortified the towns of Ramanathapuram and Pogalur and he took the important villages such as Vadakku Vattakei, Kaliarkoil and Patiamangalam from refractory chiefs. He paid a considerable sum as annual tribute to Madurai after meeting all his expenses.¹⁹ He is also said to have conquered the Vanniyars. The inscription calls him 'one who stopped the pride of Vanniyars'. These Vanniyars were probably the inhabitants of the Savageries Zamindari near Ramanathapuram.²⁰ To this class belonged most of the Poligars or feudal chieftains who disputed with the English the possession of Tirunelveli during the latter half of the

¹⁵ Taylor, Rev. William *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Madras, 1835, p. 25.

¹⁶ Taylor, Rev. William *Catalogue Reigenne*, Vol. III, Madras, 1957-62, pp. 27-29.

¹⁷ A. Sinnathambi, *History of kallars*, unpublished ph.D., thesis, Trichy, 2007, p. 42.

¹⁸ R. Sathianathaier, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, Oxford, 1924, p. 83.

¹⁹ J. H. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

²⁰ Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

last and first years of this century.²¹ The most powerful of her Madurai feudatories, he naturally became the leader of the 72 Poligars. From the position of a village magnate he became a king with the retinue and the paraphernalia of royalty.²² He was the first Sethupathi who maintained law and order in the country and protect the pilgrims from the plunder and rapine. Sadaika Thevar had an efficient police force for the safety of the pilgrims. He also repaired and enlarged the temple of Rameshwaram and made endowments to it. In AD 1607 he made a gift of five villages to the Ramanathaswami temple at Rameshwaram for the worship and offerings.²³

In the same year he gave away as gift the elevated lands of Karunkulam lying under the eight tanks of Kallikulam, Karusankulam, Velankulam, Pottakulam, Vedandaikannai, Paduvanamuttam, and Srikulam in the Appanur choultries, to the charity of Ramanathaswamy. These gifts show how careful he was in providing for the daily puja and he duly took pride in calling himself the responsible agent for the charities of Ramanathaswami who is actively engaged in worshipping Siva. He died in 1622.²⁴

Kuttan Sethupathi (AD 1622-1636)

Sadaiya Thevar left behind him four sons. His eldest son Kuttan Sethupathi succeeded him in 1622. The country was prosperous and peaceful during the fourteen years of his reign. He did not undertake any public work. He built a temple for Koorichatha Ayyanar at Ramanathapuram. He granted some villages to the temple at Tiruvadanaï immediately after his succession and also enlarged the temple at Rameshwaram. Two inscriptions in the Rameshwaram temple describe him as the 'Thalaivan' or 'the head' of the Maravas and as the 'Sethupathi'. He died in 1636.²⁵

²¹ A. J. Stuart, *Tinnevelly Gazetteer - Presidency of Madras*, Madras, 1879, p. 416.

²² V. Rangachari, *Indian Antiquary*, Govt. press, Madras, 1916, p. 106

²³ *Ibid*, p. 105.

²⁴ Catalogue, of *Copper Plate Grants in the Government Museum*, Madras, 1918, p. 37.

²⁵ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

Dalavai Sethupathi or Sadaiya Thevar (AD 1636-45)

Kuttan Sethupathi died childless and Dalavai Sethupathi, probably the adopted son of Kuttan Sethupathi, succeeded him in 1636.²⁶ According to the Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency, Kuttan Sethupathi died without heir and Sadaika who succeeded him was the brother of kuttan Sethupathi. It is probable as the chronicle says that kuttan died childless and Dalavai Sethupathi was probably the adopted son of Kuttan Sethupathi.²⁷ Sadaika Thevar ruled peacefully for the first three years. In the fourth year he had to wage wars with Madurai for reasons unknown. According to the 'History of the Carnataka Governors' Sadaika did not send revenue to the palace, was contumacious and conducted himself every in a bad manner. Tirumalai Nayak, the king hearing this wrote him a *takid* (letter) in strong terms, but he rejected the letter and ordered the messenger who carried it to be beaten. The king enraged at this summoned the seventy-two Palayakaras and sent them against the Sethupathi under Ramappaiyan. The machination of the illegitimate son of Kuttan known as Sattana Nayak alias 'Thambi' or younger brother was a more probable cause of the war. On this all authorities agree despite their difference in details. According to Wilson, the third illegitimate son of Kuttan succeeded him, but the fourth of them Adinarayana disputed the succession and with the help of his son-in-law Tiruvudaiya Vanni, a man of great tact, deposed his brother and made himself master of Ramanathapuram. Thampi hastened to Madurai and compelled Tirumalai Nayak to send an army under his General Ramappaiyan.²⁸

Wilson does not quote authorities to substantiate his statements. The chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathis, the History of the Carnataka Governors and other sources do not mention any usurpation. They all agree in saying that Sadaika was the successor of

²⁶ S. M. Kamal, *History of the Sethupati*, Sharmila Publishers, First Edition, Ramanathapuram, 2003, p.24.

²⁷ Natarajan, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

²⁸ J.H.Nelson, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

Kuttan Sethupathi. The Ramappaiyan Ammanai also says that Sadaika was the then ruling Sethupathi. If Adinarayana was then ruling over Ramanathapuram, his name and not Sadaiya's should have been mentioned in the ballad. Further, the ballad makes us infer that the position of the Maravas was secure and if there had been usurpation as Wilson would have believed, one can reasonably expect a party of the deposed Sethupathi to give trouble to Adinarayana by joining the invaders. But the Maravas stood united against the invader. Hence, it may be safely concluded that there was no usurpation on the death of Kuttan Sethupathi.

According to Nelson, the occasion of the war was the announcement of Sadaika Thevar's intention of appointing his adopted son Raghunatha Sethupathi as his successor. Thampi was openly defiant and was determined to dethrone him. Both the Ammanai and what these people say would have been correct. Thambi should have been hoping against hope that he would step into the throne of Sadaika, who had no sons and now the public pronouncement of the Sethupathi should have torpedoed the hopes of Thampi and compelled him to try his chance in a civil war. Thampi hurried to Madurai and cleverly convinced the Nayak of his right to Kuttan Sethupathi. Tirumalai Nayak despatched a huge army under the command of Ramappaiyan, his able general.²⁹

The Ramappaiyan Ammanai gives an exhaustive account of the war with Rangamman Nayak as his second in command, Ramappaiya set out on his campaign. His vast army moved along the Vaigai and at the close of the first day camped in Chinnaravuttan Palayam. The next day it reached Vandiyur. From there, after two days march they passed through Tirupuvanum and reached Manaravira Madurai. The present name is (Mana Madurai) in Alagar country. Sadaika's spies now informed the news of the march of the Sethupathi who grew furious and immediately called all the Maravas to

²⁹ *Mackenzie Collections, (Restored); No:3 Governemnt Oriental Manuscripts, Library, Madras, p.417.*

arms. Vannaimalai Kumars Magatilan, the Kurumba chief of Kondayankottai, the chiefs of Sembinaadu and Mangalanadu collected their men and joined the Sethupathi. Sadaika's son-in-law Vanniya, the bravest soldier of the day took the command of this imposing army. The two armies clashed at Ariyandapurakottai and the Marava army emerged victorious. The Madurai forces incurred a great loss and the Madurai camp was plundered. The ballad states that Madurai lost 300 men while on the side of the Maravas only 60 were killed.

Ramappaiyan without losing hope renewed the attack on the next day. He captured Ariyandapurakottai. He followed the retreating Marava forces, came to Kadankudi, crossed the Vaigai River and at Avtiyuthikottai got up to the Marava force. In the furious fight that ensued in which Sadaiya himself was wounded the Madurai army gained the upperhand. Despite Vannian's bravery, Sadaika had to retreat and Avtiyuthikottai was promptly taken by Ramappaiyan. Sadaiya, still being pursued, crossed the channel to Rameshwaram where he thought he would be safe under Lord Ramanatha's protection.

At this critical juncture Tirumalai Nayak had to divert his attention and resources to the northern limits of his kingdom where the Sultan of Bijapur was preparing for an invasion. Leaving strict orders to keep vigil over the ports and forts, Ramappaiyan hurried to the north and after trouncing the Sultan again rushed to the scene of his former activities. To lay siege to Rameshwaram he now planned to build a bridge. Thus according to Ramappaiyan Ammanai, he rebuilt the mythological Sethu. When he was discouraged by his followers, with the help of the Parangis of Sinhala, Colombo, Mannar and Cochin therefore he completed the bridge.³⁰ The Sethupathi in turn sought the help

³⁰ Danvers, F.C. *Report of the Portuguese records, Relating to the East Indies*, London, 1892, p.268.

of the Dutch. Rea says: “The Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram rebelled and entrenched himself in the islands of Pamban”.

He was assisted by a number of Europeans who came in five vessels from Ceylon and Cochin. Their motive would have been to gain a footing in the country. They might have been either Portuguese or Dutch. There were most probably the latter for that time their activity was on its increase. Vanniyan, Sadaika’s able general, when he learnt that the Madurai forces had landed in the island, offered battle with redoubled vigour. On the third day of the battle 6,000 of the Sethupathi’s forces were killed. Sadaika himself was wounded. The Maravas began to retreat. But it was again Vanniyan who turned a disaster into a victory. At this time Vanniyan had an attack of small-pox and the Ammanai states that it was brought about by Ramappaiya’s magical powers. The war was resumed the next day. The fortune of war went once again against the Maravas. Hearing this Vanniyan left his sick-bed and come to the field to save the situation. In the ongoing battle the Marava emerged victorious though they lost their hero Vanniyan.

After the death of Vanniyan, Ramappaiyan soon overpowered the Sethupathi. Sethupathi’s insolent remarks in the interview infuriated the Madurai General who took him prisoner and brought him to Madurai. The writer in the Calcutta Review questions the correctness of the assertion that the Sethupathi was taken prisoner, but states that he died a natural death.³¹ But all authorities are against him.

Thambi was then made the Sethupathi. But he had neither accepted statemanship nor declined. So he became unpopular. Once again anarchy reigned supreme. Raghunatha Sethupathi and Narayana Thevar, nephews of Dalavai Sethupathi made capital of this mess. Unable to tackle the situation, Thambi appealed to the Nayak for help. Histroy of the Carnataka Governors says “the lad sanyasis who had come from the

³¹ Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnathapuram, Madras, 1890*, p. 216.

North to go to Rameshwaram now be-set the gate of the palace for a length of time with complaint and earnestly be sought that the Sethupathi might be restored.” Realising that only Sadaika could restore order, Tirumalai released him and sent him back to his country with all honours in AD 1640. Sadaika ruled for five or six years and died. Nelson remarks that Thambi conspired against the Sethupathi and murdered him.³² But the Chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathis makes to conclude that he died a natural death and that Thambi performed the funeral rites.

The death of Sadaika was followed by disturbance in the country. Thambi had long been waiting for an opportunity to assume power himself and on the death of the Sethupathi performed the funeral rite which was not according to Hindu custom entitled him to succession. But he proved unpopular and Raghunatha Sethupathi and Narayana Thevar, claimed the *Gadi* for themselves. Fortunately Tirumalai interfered in time and he divided the whole kingdom into three parts. The sub-division with Ramanathapuram as the capital was given to Raghunatha Sethupathi while Sivaganga was allotted to Thambi and Tannaka Thevar and Narayana Thevar, the brothers of Raghunatha Sethupathi were allowed to rule Tiruvadanaï conjointly. Pharoah’s Gazetteer and the Madras Manual of Administration state that the division of the country took place during the life of Sadaika, Thampi and Tannaka Thevar. This is not supported by other authorities. Ramappaiyan Ammanai merely states that Sadaika was restored and does not mention the division of the country. The history of the Carnataka Governors and the Chronicle of the Acts also say that the division took place after the death of Sadaiya. The writer in the Calcutta Review says that there was no division of the country.

Tirumalai’s settlement was seemed satisfactory and the Chronicle states that the three ruled conjointly for ten years. But Tannaka Thevar passed away shortly after the

³² J.H.Nelson, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

partition. Raghunatha Thevar taking advantage of this annexed Tiruvadanaï. He was about to collide with Thampi. But fortunately for him Thampi died.³³ Now Raghunatha became the ruler of the whole Ramanathapuram country.

Dalavai Sethupathi was a pious man. He was a sincere devotee of his family deity Lord Ramanatha. He is said to have built the Chokkanathaswami temple in Rameshwaram. The construction of the Sabhapathi shrine in the north-east corner of the third prakara of the great temple in Rameshwaram is also attributed to him. The great eastern gopuram was attempted to be built by this Sethupathi, but had to be left abruptly owing to the rebellion of Thampi and the invasion of Ramappaiyan. "Had it been finished it would have been one of the largest of its outline being broken by sculpture, it would have produced more nearly the effect of an Egyptian pyramid than any other example of its class in India. H.A. Newell says that eastern Gopuram is a living monument to him. He caused the construction of the Hanuman Temple, consecrated Banalingam and spent all the revenues coming from the Sayalgudi division for the purpose. In addition to that, he diverted the funds derived from custom duties to be spent on construction work, lest the regular income of the temple meant for routine expenditure be utilized for this purpose. He granted several villages as *dharmasanam* or gifts for the support of Brahmins in his estate."³⁴

Raghunatha Sethupathi Alias Tirumalai Sethupathi (AD1645-1670)

Raghunatha Sethupathi alias Tirumalai Sethupathi became the ruler of the partitioned Kingdom of Ramanathapuram in AD 1645. He united the divided kingdom and he ruled over it for more than fifteen years. His reign was memorable in many respects. He made considerable additions to his territories which enhanced his power and prestige. With Thampi's help he defeated the forces of Thanjavur in a pitched battle and

³³ V. Rangachari, *Inscriptions of Madras Presidency*, Vol. II, Govt. press, Madras, 1919, p. 1161.

³⁴ Raja Ram Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

annexed the towns of Mannarkoil, Devakottai, Arantangi and Tiruvarur. He also got from the Madurai Nayak the villages of Tiruppuvanam, Tiruchuli and Pallimadam in appreciation of the services rendered by him during the Mysore war. These new acquisitions greatly increased the extent of the kingdom and from this time onwards the Sethupathi ruled not as a tributary but independently.³⁵ He gave a new fillip to literature and art and the poets and scholars received his liberal patronage. Above all, there was prosperity everywhere. He was called the greatest of the Sethupathis for setting up a strong government in the midst of chaos and confusion.

Loyalty was the key-note of his policy towards the Nayak at Madurai. As the country had been very much troubled by the late wars, he thought by recognising the authority of Tirumalai Nayak, he could easily restore peace and order in the country. Nelson says that he once repelled an uprising of Muslims under Kutub Khan in return for which he was honoured with the title of 'One who Propped up the Kingdom'³⁶ and also received permission to celebrate the Navarathri or 'nine nights' festival in his own capital with the same pomp and pageantry with which it was celebrated at Madurai. According to the Jesuit Account³⁷ the Muslims after the capture of Gingee entered the dominions of Madurai and it is told by a chronicle, Kallans that he routed and repelled Muslims who returned discomfited to Gingee.³⁸ It is quite likely that the Sethupathi seeing his master in distress went to his rescue and contributed to the victory.

Soon a good opportunity presented itself for the Sethupathi to show his loyalty to Nayak. The poligar of Ettayapuram in the Tirunelveli district at the head of a confederation invaded Madurai. The Sethupathi as the Chief of the Poligars was asked to

³⁵ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit*, p. 26.

³⁶ J.M.Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 138.

³⁷ R. Sathianathaier, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1924, p. 130.

³⁸ Tayler, William, *Catalogue Reissenne*, Vol. III, Madras, 1957-62, p. 40.

deal with the rebellion and he crushed the rebellion with an iron hand and satisfied the Nayak. He captured the leaders and put them to death. He restored peace in the country in a few months. The Nayak was again immensely pleased and as a token of his appreciation the Sethupathi was given a large slice of land near Mannarkoil in the Tirunelveli country, saddled with the trifling responsibility of protecting the pearl fishery which yielded considerable sums of money to the royal treasury at Madurai.³⁹ The pearl fishery to the north of the island of Pamban was now admitted to be the property of Sethupathi. The victory over the Chief of Ettayapuram is confirmed by a passage in 'Thalasingamalai' which describes the Setupais as one whose feet are adorned by the head of Ettan. Tirumalai Sethupathi in order to show his hatred for the rebellious chief had a design of his head made and wore it on his foot.

The Sethupathi's help was again sought by Tirumalai Nayak who in his war against Vijayanagar emperor sought the help of the Sultan of Bijapur and with his help put an end to Sri Ranga's hope of ever reviving the empire. The King of Mysore Kanthirava Narasa had been waiting to avenge his defeat at the hands of Tirumalai in AD 1625.⁴⁰ Kanthirava Narasa marched upon Madurai with a huge force and captured Satyamangalam. He subjected the inhabitants to horrible atrocities. Encouraged by this success he advanced to the gates of the capital in order to capture Madurai itself. There he captured hundreds of men and women deprived them of their noses, as a method of torture.⁴¹ Realising the danger faced by him the Nayak who was in his sick-bed appealed to his faithful vassal Sethupathi to come to his rescue at this crisis. Tirumalai Sethupathi collected in no time an army of 25,000 men and marched towards Madurai to protect the city and save the honour of his overlord. Encouraged by this Tirumalai collected his own army of 35,000 and prepared to offer battle. The Mysore General now felt diffident of

³⁹ J.H.Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ V. Rangachariya, *Indian Antiquary*, Govt. press, Madras, 1916, p. 166.

⁴¹ R. Sathianathaier, *op. cit*, p. 135.

success and tired all means to put off the fight hoping to get some reinforcement. He tried to win over Tirumalai's crafty general to his side by huge bribes. The General after accepting the bribes tried to postpone the fight despite the fact that Mysore forces were no match to those of Madurai. The loyal Marava suspected some mischief, seized the traitor and made him prisoner and fell furiously on the Mysore army. In two fierce battles, the Sethupathis routed the Mysore army and drove it to the Dindigul fort.⁴² In a few days they were joined by a reinforcement of 20,000 soldiers. Then the Mysore General offered battle and it was furious and each army lost nearly twelve thousand men.⁴³

The Sethupathi thus brought the 'War of the Noses' as it came to be called a successful termination. As the Jesuit father Antony de Provenca wrote, "the ruin of Madurai would have been assured but for the help of the Sethupathi."⁴⁴ The courage and loyalty displayed by the Sethupathi during the Mysore War greatly pleased Tirumalai who rewarded him in a fitting manner. He presented him with a number of elephants, horses, robes of honour and ornaments. He conferred on him the rare privilege of using the lion-faced palanquin and titles like 'Tirumalai Sethupathi', 'the protector of the Queen's Thali (the sacred string) and 'one who propped up the kingdom'.⁴⁵ He was treated as the 'adopted son' and was exempted from the payment of taxes. Raghunatha Sethupathi was also presented with a Durga idol of 1 ¼ foot height, made of gold which is now worshipped as Raja Rajeswari. He added the villages of Tiruppavanam, Tiruchuli and Pallimadam to his dominions of the Sethupathi. Nelson rightly remarks "the dependency thus enlarged was a very considerable extent and capable in those days of wielding notable influence over the politics of South India."⁴⁶ On his return to Pogalur, he

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 137.

⁴³ Bertrand, *La Mission du Madura*, Vol. III, Paris, 1848, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual - Tamil Nadu State of Ramnathapuram*, Madras, 1890, p. 222.

⁴⁵ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Interview with *Mr Arumugham*, egg business Ramanathapuram, dt.12.06.2014.

built for himself a stone fort and “from that time onwards the Sethupathi ruled not as a tributary but independently.”

After returning to his capital Tirumalai Sethupathi devoted his entire attention to the peaceful arts of good government. The country slowly recovered from the effects of the late wars. About the year AD 1663 the Bijapur army led by Vannian, the famous captain of Idal Khan marched upon Tiruchirappalli. The Madurai Nayak now sought the help of the Sethupathi but the Sethupathi failed to respond.⁴⁷ It is likely that Tirumalai Sethupathi who was exempt from tribute and highly honoured by Tirumalai thought too much of his status to be loyal to the young king and to cooperate with him in his undertakings.⁴⁸ Perhaps the Sethupathi was becoming old and had no inclination for war. The help rendered to the Madurai Nayak on the previous occasions should have cost the Marava country a good deal and now the Sethupathi was perhaps loath to disturb the country by collecting another army. Certainly the Nayak could not expect the Sethupathi to be helping his lord always at the expenses of the interests of the people.⁴⁹ Chokkanatha after his victory over Thanjavur taking advantage of the spirit of his victorious troops to punish his Vasal marched upon the Marava country and captured the forts of Tirupattur, Mana Madurai, Kalayarkoil and some other places of less importance.⁵⁰ But these losses did not deter the Sethupathi. Full of confidence he retired into the heart of the forest and refrained from any open war, but often came out of the forest attacked the Madurai forces unaware and thus gave them trouble. Chokkanatha soon got fed up with this guerrilla war-fare. He had moreover to celebrate some religious festivals in his capital. So he entrusted the further conduct of operations to some of his generals and returned to Madurai. In a short time the scales were turned against him. The Generals, he left behind were fit for nothing. The Sethupathi emerged out of the

⁴⁷ Bertrand, *op. cit.*, p. 160 and R. Sathianathaier, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁴⁹ S. Natarajan, *op.cit.*, p.51.

⁵⁰ Bertrand, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

forest, took the offensive and intimate local knowledge coupled with skill in fighting in such a country as Ramanathapuram gave him the advantage. “Chokkanatha plunged in deep grief by the news of the shameful defeats which his Captains had sustained in the Marava country was not received any visit.⁵¹ He had reluctantly to give up the idea of humbling his vassal’s pride and withdrawing the greater portion of his troops from the seat of war, contented himself with garrisoning and holding the principal places in the Marava Country.⁵² Tirumalai Sethupathi ruled quietly for about four years after this and breathed his last. Two inscriptions at Tirumayam in the Pudukkottai district records gifts for the merit of Dalavai Raghunatha Narendra in the year (AD 1669).⁵³ As Natarajan says these two inscriptions are to be taken as the guide and all other dates suggested should be rejected. Nelson and Sathinanathaier believe that he died about AD 1674 when Alagiri was ruling in Thanjavur. Iyer tries to strengthen his view by a reference to an inscription at Hanumanthakudi recording a grant to a Muslim by Tirumalai Sethupathi in AD 1673-74.⁵⁴ An inscription dated AD 1679 also mentions a Tirumalai Sethupathi⁵⁵ but as Natarajan thinks that this inscription should be taken to refer to Kilavan Sethupathi. Rangachari is inclined to give 1670 as the year of the Sethupathi’s death, but the existence of the inscription referred to above makes him doubt the correctness of the date. He further writes “the Tirumalai died in AD 1670 after a long and beneficent rule of 30 years.” The date is all right but the number of years assigned to the Sethupathi is wrong. Rangachari accepts AD 1645 as the year of Sadaiya’s death and thirty years from that date would be AD 1675 and not AD 1670. The Chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathis states that Tirumalai Sethupathi ruled conjointly for 10 years and independently for 26 years and according to the Chronicle,

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 182.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 160.

⁵³ V. Rangacharya, *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. II, Madras, 1919, p. 1652.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.1196.

⁵⁵ Tayler, Rev.William, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

the death of the Sethupathi should be placed in AD 1685.⁵⁶ This is impossible for the rescue of Chokkanatha from the tyranny of Rustam Khan which happened in AD 1682 is clearly attributed to Kilavan Sethupathi.⁵⁷

Tirumalai Sethupathi was a patron of letters and a plethora of poets sang his praise at his court and received his munificent gifts. It was during his time that Mithilaipatti Alagiya Chitrabala Kavirayar flourished and wrote his ‘Thalasingamalai; Ponnangal Amirtha Kavirayar, the author of the ‘Oruthurai Kovai’ also adorned his court. It is said that the Sethupathi rewarded the poet with four hundred golden coconuts for the poet’s flair for puns – which in Sanskrit ‘Slesha’ and (what is called in Tamil ‘Sledai’) in the Kovai. He patronised Telugu Scholars also. To honour his overlord, he decided to introduce Telugu, the Nayak mother-tongue in his country. He made it the alternate language in his court at Ramanathapuram. Some of his documents were in Telugu. One of his still extant documents, a palm leaf record dated AD 1658 purporting to be an order issued by him for the appointment of Sankara Iyer, the priest of Rajeswari Ammankoil within the palace of Ramanathapuram bears the Telugu seal of the Sethupathi.

Tirumalai Sethupathi or Raghunatha Sethupathi was noted for piety and a charitable disposition. He was very much devoted to Ramanathaswami and Parvathavardhani. He is said to have given the *Hiranyagarbha Dhana* means a ritual present of a golden cow whose bowels are filled with gold and the donor passes through the bowels of the cow before presenting it to a deserving donee and his *Birudavali* (string of titles) that includes the title of ‘*Hiranyagarbhayaji*’. He took particular interest in the proper performance of the Puja as is shown by an inscription dated AD 1658 which states that “the former kings had not given any villages or land for Puja and cooking

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 203-204.

services to God Ramanathaswami and Goddess Parvathavardhani. He gave the assembly of Maratha gurukkals some privileges and ordered to conduct the pooja and the calling services.⁵⁸ He has been observed already as the first to celebrate the Navarathri festival on the same scale as in Madurai. He also made considerable additions to the temple itself. Fergusson is inclined to attribute the construction of the second prakara measuring 386 feet by 314 feet to him and according to him it was completed by AD 1658.⁵⁹ Statues of Tirumalai Sethupathi and that of his son are erected near the southern entrance into the Ammankoil and are even today honoured with offerings of betelnut and flowers every Friday night when the image of the swami is brought to this place on its way to *Palliyarai* (Bed-Chamber). He also made gifts of lands to various temples and mutts. An inscription dated AD 1678 registered a gift of the village of Sattanur by the king to the temple of Tondaniswaran Udaiyar at Sivapuri.⁶⁰ He built a temple for Goddess Vanakasi Amman and another for Mariamman in Ramanathapuram out of gratitude for his recovery from an attack of small-pox. The Malaivalar Kathali Amman temple in Melachirupathu also owes its existence to the piety and munificence of this king. He also built a Siva temple for Lord Gurunathaswami. He made donations to various private institutions as well. An inscription of AD 1654 records a gift of lands to Ahobila of Kaundinya Gotra. He endowed the Kothandaraman Chatram with the village of Pandapanedal in AD 1670. The Barber's Madam at Rameshwaram founded by a barber also received some gifts from him in AD 1666.

He also built a village at Rameshwaram to which Ramappaiyan had made access by the construction of a permanent cause – way during the war with Dalavai Sethupathi and from this circumstances took the title of 'the Master of Rameshwaram of Ramswarathiya'. He granted about fifty villages for the support of several Brahmin

⁵⁸ Burgees and Natesa Sastri, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, Madras, 1886, p. 72.

⁵⁹ Fergusson, J., *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. II, London, 1910, p. 359.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 360.

families in his Estate. He endowed the temples at Anaiyoor, Velimuthy, Vadathankulam, Tiruchuli and other places and also the Tiruvaduthurai Madam in the Thanjavur district.⁶¹ It is said that he caused a cow to be made of gold and passed his body through it i.e. he performed the *Hiranyagarbha*.

Surya Thevar and Athana Thevar (AD 1670)

Tirumalai Sethupathi had two sons and the eldest of these two by name Surya Thevar of Raja Surya succeeded him to the throne. His reign lasted only for six months. An inscription dated in AD 1679 Siddarti records a gift for the merit of Raghunatha Tirumalai Kattadeva Rajasurya Thevar. This should have been issued a long after the death of Rajasurya and as the government at points out the above view is suggested by the fact that the inscription is not dated in any reign.

During his period of office he got himself involved in the intrigues of the Thanjavur court and lost his life in the process. Alagiri, an ally of Chokkanantha Nayak of Madurai was ruling Thanjavur, Chengamaladas, an aspirant to the power with the support of Ekoji, a Maratha free-booter, challenged the former's position. Wilson and later writers say that Chengamaladas successfully applied to Raja Surya for help against Madurai. In the war that ensued Raja Surya supported the cause of Chengamaladas against Chokkanatha.⁶² The details of the coalition are obscure. But Dalavai Venkata Krishnappa who was commander-in-chief of the Nayak's forces in their operations in Thanjavur captured Raja Surya by means of a stratagem and he was thrown into prison at Tiruchirappalli where he was secretly put to death by the orders of the Dalavai.⁶³ It is already seen that Tirumalai Sethupathi died in 1670. The chronicle and the authorities agree in assigning only six months of rule for this king. The war of Chokkanatha with

⁶¹ Raja Rama Rao, *op. cit*, p. 225.

⁶² R. Sathianathaier, *op. cit*, p. 184.

⁶³ J.H.Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 206.

the Thanjavur Raja took place about AD 1673. It is also agreed that Chengamaladas at the time of the fall of Thanjavur was only a boy. So Chengamaladas could have fought with Chokkanatha Nayak years later than 1673.⁶⁴ Then it was impossible for a prince who died in AD 1670 to have taken sides in a war fought after AD 1673. Once it is proved that he did not fight against Madurai it is unnecessary to deny the statement that he was caught by means of a stratagem by the Dalavai.⁶⁵

Soon after the death of Surya Thevar, his youngest brother Athana Raghunatha became the Sethupathi. He too was not destined to rule for long and he died after governing the country only for three months.

Raghunatha Thevar Sethupathi alias Kilavan Sethupathi (AD 1671 – 1710)

Both Raja Surya and Athana died without any heir. Even the sisters of the late Sethupathi had no issue⁶⁶ so there was no suitable person to succeed to the kingdom. No agreement could be immediately arrived at regarding the succession. The result was an interregnum. Slowly Raghunatha Thevar alias Kilavan Sethupathi worked up his way and became the Sethupathi with the help of Chokkanatha. The Chronicle states that as there was no suitable person to succeed to the kingdom, the relations of that Marava tribe with the inhabitants of that country and the official persons of the capital all assembled and crowned Raghunatha Thevar.⁶⁷ Nelson gives a slightly different version of the events that took place after the death of Surya Thevar. He writes: “After his death, the principal Maravas could not agree in the matter of the choice of a successor and the government was carried on temporarily by an officer who had served the late Raghunatha in the not very distinguished capacity of a betelnut bearer. And another Maravan named Athana was chosen to preside at the celebration of the nine nights’

⁶⁴ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

⁶⁵ S.Natarajan, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ S.M, Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Raja Ram Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

ceremony, a duty of the very highest order in the estimation of the people of Ramanathapuram.

Shortly afterwards the son of the last Sethupathi succeeded in fighting their way to the throne and commenced a reign destined to extend over a period of not less than thirty-six years. The correct name or title of this prince was Raghunatha but he is better known in history by the sobriquet Kilavan or aged.⁶⁸ Messrs. Nelson and Sewell regard him as the illegitimate son of Raja Surya. Pharoah and Macklene consider him the uncle's grandson of Athana Thevar. The writer in the Calcutta Review considers him the paternal cousin of Raja Surya. On the other hand Sivagami Nachiyar's Pedigree describes him as uncle's grandson to Athana. Raghunatha must have been at the time of his accession in his fifties to deserve the sobriquet Kilavan or old man and it is incredible that Raja Surya left behind him an illegitimate son so aged. It is also equally incredible that he was the uncle's grandson of Athana Thevar. Probably what the writer in the Calcutta Review says is correct. Further Kilavan means legitimate also.⁶⁹

Kilavan Sethupathi commenced his rule by killing the two principal men to whom he owed his position so that they might not create any more rival Sethupathi.⁷⁰ He played a prominent part in frustrating the attempts of one Rustum Khan to establish a Muslim dynasty in Tiruchirappalli.⁷¹ Rustum Khan, a favourite soldier of Chokkanatha was a cavalry officer in the Nayak's force. As a result of Chokkanatha's fruitless wars against Thanjavur, the Mysoreans had captured the fortress on the northern frontier and threatened Madurai itself. Under these circumstances Chokkanatha was deposed and his younger brother Muthulinga Nayak alias Muthu Alakadu became the king. But even the new king was not able to restore order. Heavy floods caused untold havoc. Rustum Khan

⁶⁸ J.H.Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 206.

⁶⁹ N. C. Kandaiah Pillai, *A Tamil-English Dictionary*, p. 16.

⁷⁰ Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 206.

⁷¹ Besse Leon; *La Mission du Madura*, Trichirappalli, 1914, p.3.

usurped the throne and threw the Nayak into prison. To appease public fury he released Chokkanatha and kept him nominally on the throne for two years. Then Rustum Khan's weakness as a ruler was exposed by his total failure to conduct the defence effectively during the siege of Tiruchirappalli by the Mysoreans in AD 1680. This occasion was utilized to plot against the usurper. One Govindappaiyan, Kilavan Sethupathi and Chinna Katri Nayaka of Cannivadi and some other adherents of Chokkanantha joined together and fired about two thousand shots immediately. Rustum Khan with his followers was killed and Chokkanatha was restored. This in brief is the story of the restoration of the Nayak from the thralldom of his erstwhile favourite. One redeeming feature about this episode is that all the authorities are agreed in assigning a very important part to the Sethupathi in this. It is said that he effected an entry into the fort by burning down the southern gate. In recognition of this valuable help rendered, the Nayak was pleased to confer the title of 'Para Raja Kesari' (Lion to Foreign Kings and transfer the services of his Dalavai Kumara Pillai to him.

The Sethupathi's loyalty to the Madurai Nayak did not last long and when Kumaraiya, the famous Mysore General invaded the Madurai Kingdom, the Sethupathi did not go to the rescue of his overlord with any sincerity of purpose as is evident from the letter of Andrew Freire dated AD 1682, stating the sole object of the Maravas who came with their armies under the pretext of defending the sovereign was to get a share of the pillage.⁷² Later he seems to have actively turned against the Nayak and rendered active help to the Mysoreans. The reason for this as John de Britto states in his letter the kingdom of Madurai was in shreds.⁷³ Taking advantage of this situation both the Mysore and Thanjavur kings were adding themselves portions of the Madurai kingdom. The Sethupathi also tried to make capital out of the situation. In order to plunder Madurai, he

⁷² Bertrand, *op.cit*, p. 305.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 337.

joined Mysore and in AD 1683 he was able to add considerable portions of the Madurai kingdom to his dominions.⁷⁴ The succession of Muthu Virappa III (AD 1682-89) did not improve matters. Kilavan Sethupathi, it seems, now engaged himself in intriguing against Madurai. It appears that in 1686 he joined the side of the ex-Dalavai Venkata Krishnappa who was in revolt against the king of Madurai and Chengamaladas (the last of the Thanjavur Nayaks) who had reconciled himself with Ekoji who had driven him out of his kingdom in organizing an attack on Madurai. In return for military help from Thanjavur, Kilavan should cede to Thanjavur for a term of twelve years the districts between Pamban and Pudukkottai. Meanwhile, Kumarapillai, the Sethupathi's Dalavai (whose services were transferred to the Sethupathi by Chokkanatha) thought proper to rebel against his master and hatched a plot to seize him and Venkata Krishnappa and deliver them to the king of Madurai as traitors. But before this perfidy could be accomplished, the intended victims were apprised of what was going on and the traitor was himself seized and most cruelly punished. His hands and feet were cut off and he was then impaled on a sharp stile. His near and dear relatives were put to death on the same day.

These cruel acts led to the clash of the troops of the Sethupathi and those of the Nayak near Ramanathapuram as a result of which a decisive battle ensued in which the Thanjavur ruler Ekoji sided the Sethupathi with his troops under the command of his able General Varaboji Pandithar.

Finally Kilavan emerged victorious and the Nayak was therefore forced to withdraw his troops hastily. Sathianathaier is of opinion that the boast of Shahji to have conquered all the Pattukkottai country inhabited by Kallans extending to the south as far

⁷⁴ R.Sathianathaier, *op.cit*, p. 191.

as the Pambanar⁷⁵ records in an inscription of 1683 found in the ruined fort of Pattukkottai was probably due to the secession to him by the Sethupathi of the territory referred to in recognition of his services in this campaign.⁷⁶

As misfortune would have it the new alliance between the Sethupathi and the Thanjavur king did not last long. The failure of the Thanjavur ruler to cede to the Sethupathi, the districts north of the Pambar as per the terms of the treaty of AD 1686 forced the Sethupathi to invade the Thanjavur country and capture the fortress of Arantangi, Tirumayam, Piranmalai and all the areas south of the Ambuil or Ambari river. But the Sethupathi was unable to take the fortress of Pudukkottai. The war then was brought to a close and from that time the Sethupathi appeared to have remained in undisturbed possession of his northern territories.⁷⁷ Mangammal, who was the Nayak regent of the Madurai country at this period wanted to reduce the Sethupathi to submission. In 1702, Mangammal despatched an army under her Dalavai Narasappaiya. The Thanjavur king hoping to regain his lost territories also joined the Madurai queen. Undaunted and unruffled by this combination, Kilavan was able to defy it and establish his independence. He marched against them and inflicted on them a crushing defeat and forced them to retreat. The Dalavai lost his life in the campaign. Nelson remarks: "It seems strange at first sight that so small and unimportant a state as Ramanathapuram should have been able to resist even for a few days the attack of the combined armies of so large a kingdom as Madurai and so rich a country as Thanjavur, but it is by no means difficult to account for the fact that it was able not only to resist but to defeat them. The reason was probably this. This army of the king of Madurai consisted of bodies of men belonging to different castes who were for the most part strangers in the land in which they lived and animated by no feelings of patriotism or of loyalty to the king or fidelity

⁷⁵ F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, Cosmo Publications, Tanjore, 2000, p. 253.

⁷⁶ R. Sathianathaier, *op.cit*, p. 199.

⁷⁷ Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 235.

to their General But the Ramanathapuram army was differently constituted and was animated by an entirely different spirit. They marched to battle like a numerous band of the brothers led by a common father and were able to forget for the moment all petty animosities and feuds.”⁷⁸ But the king of Thanjavur was unnerved by these reverses. He was on the look out for a golden opportunity to invade Ramanathapuram. That opportunity presented itself in AD 1709 when the country was weakened and desolated as a result of an extraordinary drought. He availed himself of the opportunity by invading the country but he was no match to Kilavan. Hence Kilavan had no difficulty in driving the Thanjavur soldiers and forcing the king to sue for peace. It is said that Kilavan had it in his power to place on the field in the course of eight days from thirt to forty thousand men. At the end of the war Kilavan captured the strong fortress of Arantangi from Thanjavur. Thus, it was ended the long conflict between Ramanathapuram on the one hand and Thanjavur and Madurai on the other. Kilavan proved his superior organizing ability and he became more powerful than ever before.

Another notable achievement of Kilavan was the establishment of the Tondaiman, a Raja of Pudukkottai. Ilandari Ambalakaran’s manuscript gives the following account of the rise of the Tondaiman. Raghunatha Sethupathi hearing the prowess of the Tondaiman invited Raghunatha Raja Tondaiman and his brother and appointed them to military posts. Raghunatha Raja is said to have won the favour of the Sethupathi by his heroic exploits. At this time the Sethupathi fell in love with Kathali or Katteri, sister of the Tondaiman and married her. The Sethupathi wanted to present the Tondaiman with a Palayam and the Palayam of the Pallavarayar was suggested. After some initial difficulties those lands were secured for the Tondaiman through the activities of Ilandari

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 235-236.

Muthuvijaya Ambalakaran. This is the brief account of the Sethupathi origin of the Pudukkottia state.⁷⁹

The Palace records and indigenous chronicles give a different account. According to them the founder of the family was one Tirumalai Tondaiman who migrated from Tirupati and settled in Ambukkivil (near Pudukkottai) seventeen generations before the middle of the 17th century. The 18th in this line one Avadai Raghunatha Tondaiman is said to have conquered the Pallavarayas in AD 1639 with the permission of the Vijayanagar king and founded the present Pudukkottai state.⁸⁰

The two accounts appear to be conflicting at first sight but as Rangachari suggests that “there need be no inconsistency between the theories.” It is quite possible that while the Pallavarayas were ruling at Pudukkottai, there was a contemporary line of chiefs at Ambukkivil. Most probably the two lines of chiefs were constant rivals till at last he who was ruling at Ambukkivil in the middle of the 17th century conquered his contemporary at Pudukkottai and got himself confirmed in his new acquisition by Kilavan Sethupathi as he was his brother-in-law.⁸¹

Radhakrishna Iyer questions the authenticity of the origin of the state of Sethupathi and tries to prove “it was only a tract of land to the south of the Vellar that the Tondaiman got from the Sethupathi and not the much more extensive dominions to the north of the river subject to the last of the Pallavaraya rulers.”⁸²

Radhakrishna Iyer also states that the origin of Sethupathi has been based on a petition presented to the Tondaiman by one of the descendants of Ambalakaran Servaikaran and that the accounts of the services of the Ambalakaran must be taken with

⁷⁹ Radhakrishna Iyer, *History of Pudukkottai*, Birhadambhal Press, Pudukkottai, 1916, p. 127.

⁸⁰ V. Rangacharya, *Indian Antiquary*, Govt. press, Madras, 1917, p. 47.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁸² Radhakrishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

the proverbial grain of salt.⁸³ His contention is that Pudukkottai was never under the sway of the Sethupathis and as such the Sethupathi could not have given to the Tondaiman the territories which he himself did not own. As Castetes remarks, “Kallar country was within the changing portion of the Sethupathi’s dominion that grew and contracted with kaleidoscopic rapidity of those times. A Jesuit letter dated AD 1682 records a Marava in-road into the Kallar country. Nelson states that his raid was occasioned by an in road into the Marava country in the early years of Kilavan’s reign.⁸⁴ It is just probable that the Sethupathi was in temporary possession of Pudukkottai and might have granted it to Raghunatha Tondaiman whose sister he married. The probability is increased by the use of the expression the newly made Tondaiman in an annual letter to Rome of AD 1746 stating that the sixteenth year of the foundation of the Tondaiman kingdom was fast approaching.

Kilavan Sethupathi was a devout Hindu and made many munificent gifts to various temples and charitable institutions. A grant of AD 1679⁸⁵ records a gift of lands to a temple at Tiruvadanaï in the Madurai district. In AD 1684⁸⁶ he again granted certain lands near Sundarapandya Pattanam for the maintenance of a mutt on the auspicious occasion of a solar eclipse. In AD 1685⁸⁷ he dedicated to Eluvapur Isvarar and goddess Akilandeswari of the Tennalai country in the district of Kalairkoil, the three villages of Pudukkottai, Kallikudi and Edayanvayal.

His intense religious sentiments did not make him a fierce bigot and persecutor of other religions. Of course he caused the brutal murder of John de Britto and it will be shown presently that this act was due to the causes other than religious bigotry. An

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁸⁴ J. H. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ R. Sewell, *Lists of Antiquities*, Vol. I, Government Press, Madras, 1882, p. 302.

⁸⁶ *Catalogue of Copper Plate Grants in the Govt. Museum*, Madras, 1918, p. 38.

⁸⁷ Burgess and Natesa Sastri, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, Madras, 1886, p. 91.

inscription of AD 1672⁸⁸ in a local Masjid at Hanumanthagudi in Tiruvadana Taluk records gifts of land to a Muslim. This proves conclusively that he patronized those who professed other religions also. That he was a friend of the Muslims is further proved by the fact some Marakayars helped him with money in the construction of fort at Ramanathapuram.

Christianity even from the beginning did not have a favourable reception in the Marava country. As the Maravas were deeply devoted to their religion from very ancient times, they could not be silent spectators when their very gods were condemned by the missionaries. But still Christianity was able to make some headway in the country and Andrew Friere tells that a well-known Marava Chief was converted to the new religion.⁸⁹ This success however did not further their cause; on the other hand it proved to be a curse. This probably was the cause of the severe persecution of the Christians in AD 1669 and from then the missionary activities was very dull for a period of twelve years.⁹⁰

Kilavan Sethupathi's reign is memorable for the work of John de Britto in the field of propagating the Christian faith. The subject has been discussed in extend by Nelson and Fr Bertrand. Fr John de Britto of the Madurai Mission made the Marava country as the centre of his work and incurred the wrath of the Sethupathi by his proselytizing seal. He was born in Lisbon in AD 1647. At the age of nine he was chosen to study with a prince. In AD 1659 he was so reduced that the doctors lost hope of his recovery. When he cured from it he then became the Novice of the Jesuits. For three years he lived in Goa so rigorously that he was said to have 'made a Madurai in his cell'. He studied languages, begged from door to door for the poor, thought children and once

⁸⁸ V. Rangacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 1196.

⁸⁹ Bertrand, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁹⁰ S. Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

was attacked by a crowd for saving two young people. He was called to teach in a college in Malabar, but went with Friere to Madurai as the successor of the Pandaram Father Alvares.⁹¹ After meeting with failure to propagate Christianity at Madurai; he entered Marava where no missionary had been for seventeen years. While he was passing near the famous town of Sivaganga he was arrested by the soldiers of a Marava General and taken before the king. There he was put in irons attached to stumps of trees and tortured all night and part of the next day. Then the water torture was applied. It consisted in raising the victim by a cord attached to his arms and drawn over another cord, then dropping him into a tank when he could be pulled under to drown or drawn up to be dropped a second time. With five Christians he was taken to the temple of Kalaiyarkoil, nine miles from Sivaganga and there suspended to a tree by two cords fastened to his feet and hands. After a long time, they were all taken to a den, then to a dirty cell where they had only a handful of rice a day for eleven days. Next they were taken nine miles further north and there commanded to invoke Siva. When they refused, the general was no enraged that he kicked and struck them. De Britto turned the other cheek.

He was condemned to have his hands and feet cut off and then to be impaled. The others being younger were to lose one foot, one hand, ears, nose and tongue and then to be returned to their families. The executioner flogged them and caused blood to flow from all their members. De Britto was cast upon a rock with rough projections and trampled under foot by eight persons until the projections entered his flesh and then was left until evening when he was taken to his cell. Some days later the executioners come with impaling stakes and axes and blocks to cut off his limbs. But suddenly a messenger from the King summoned the General to his defence against a plot to take the king's life and De Britto was spared for the time being.

⁹¹ *Letter of Father Proenza*, 1665, p. 8. (Shenbaganur Records)

For twenty-two days he was held in uncertainty, and then taken rapidly barefooted to Ramanathapuram, the capital of the Marava kingdom. There he was lodged first in a horse stable, then in a cell. When the Brahmins came to dispute with him, even in his suffering he courageously combated them. Finally, the king received him in the palace, listened to him and accorded to him life and liberty; but he forbade him to preach on pain of death because he condemned idolatry, polygamy and robbery. In consequence of all this experience when De Britto visited the Fr Provincial he embraced him and offered to send him to Portugal to bring more missionaries. Though unwilling at first, yet he yielded and embarked at Goa for Lisbon early in AD 1688 and reached Lisbon at the end of the year. Great and small wished to see him and he was honoured at court. He retained his Indian costume, drank no wine and slept on the hard floor on a bear-skin.

The king wished to keep De Britto in Portugal but he declared that he ought to return. So he returned. Since his expulsion other missionaries had not dared to enter Marava, lest the neophytes should suffer. But De Britto's heart was there; so he put himself under the protection of a Lord who was a vassal of the Madurai Nayak and obtained leave to fix his residence on the borders of Marava. There he baptised 8,000 neophytes at one time and during the ceremony had to have his arms supported by Catechists. His church was too small and he secretly established three chapels in Marava country itself.

A Marava prince named Tadia Thevar or Tiriya Thevar⁹² was bedridden and sent ambassadors for De Britto promising to join him. A catechist was sent who healed the prince. Again he sent for the Father. De Britto hesitated but finally determined to take up the opportunity. Tadia Thevar received him 'like an angel'. At first his wives were an

⁹² *Letter from Fr De Britto to Fr General from the Marava, 22.07.1692. (Shenbaganur Records)*

except the eldest obstacle but at long last he sent them away providing for them like sisters. De Britto baptized him and spent several days in his palace.

These events roused his enemies. The fifth wife of Tadia Thevar tried in vain to make him change his mind. She then threw herself at the feet of the king who was her uncle begging him to punish the missionary. She also went to the chief of the Brahmins and found him only too ready. He called the Brahmins together and they told the king that all the people were embracing the gods of the Parangis. The king, oppressed by the cries of his niece ordered the churches to be burned and the leaders to be brought before him. The Soldiers went in four bands, one to each chapel, and one against the lord of Madurai who protected De Britto. These events happened between AD 1690 and 1692.

On 8th January 1693, De Britto having celebrated mass advised all to withdraw to their houses and remained alone. Soldiers came covered him with blows and put him in chains. Others captured and brought in three neophytes who were also chained. Soldiers held the chains of the four prisoners and made them run behind horses. De Britto was constantly falling but they beat him along for four hours until they reached a convenient place for the night. There they mounted all the prisoners on a cart to be gazed at. Thus they were taken to Ramanathapuram where they arrived on 11th January, and were thrown into vile jails.⁹³

The Brahmins urged the king to hasten the Father's death and suggested execution by secrecy. He consented and they held the sacrifice called *Sathru Sangaram* or *Samharam* (destruction of enemies). It failed, and they tried a second time saying he would die in five days but he lived. The king in despair caused De Britto to appear before him; and a captain struck him rudely but he turned the other cheek. The king believed that he neutralised the effect of the *Sathru Samharam* sacrifice and asked

⁹³ Taylor, Rev. William, *op.cit.*, p.223.

whether a musket ball could hit him. De Britto said it could and uncovered his breast revealing his breviary (prayer book). This, the king thought must be a charm and ordered his execution by other means.

When the soldiers started to carry out the king's order the Christian prince Tadia Thevar forbade them from doing so and boldly told the king that if he dared to execute De Britto he would not be a silent spectator. The king pretended to yield and condemned him to exile. But when his friends started to accompany him they were sent back. He was really sent to another Marava Prince by name Udaiya Thevan, then evidently a local chief at Oriyur to be tortured to death.

This prince was a leper and offered to save De Britto if he would heal him. Failing in this he ordered him to worship Siva, which he refused to do. One Muthupillai was then ordered to behead him; but Muthupillai avowed himself a Christian. The Governor next ordered one perumal to do it and he was willing. During the night of 3rd February, De Britto wrote with charcoal and straw the words, "Arrived Jan. 31st; awaiting death."⁹⁴

The next day the Governor gave the fatal order. De Britto fell upon the ground thanking God. They took him to a plain and perumal was ordered to strike off his head. De Britto asked permission to pray and did so for fifteen minutes; he then embraced his executioner and knelt before him. Seeing a charm around his neck the soldier first cut the cord, making a gash; then with one blow he left the head hanging on the breast. He then cut off the hands and feet and suspended them to the trunk with the head and in this condition the body was exposed on the gallows.⁹⁵ It was finally burned. Neophytes saved some relics. De Britto was forty-six years old when he died.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Chandler, J.S. *The Jesuit Mission in Madura*, Trichinopoly, 1909, Pp.57-61.

⁹⁵ P. Vettivayal Valavan, *Anand Gangai Thuthoo*, Malar 5, Nov-2011 Pastoral Centre, Sivagangai, 2011, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mr P. Vettivayal Valavan, Retd. Teacher in Govt. School Muppaiyur, Ramanathapuram, dated 12.03.2015.

Nelson thinks that the sole reason for the brutal murder of De Britto as far as can be gathered from the gossipy writing of the Jesuits seems to have been the animosity excited in the minds of the Hindu clergy by the circumstances of their fees and emoluments being daily reduced in value in proportion as converts to Christianity became more numerous. Had it not been for this inevitable incident and had not the Society of Jesus been suppressed in AD 1773 probably the greater part of the population amongst whom the Madurai Mission worked would at present be came Christians.⁹⁷

But Kilavan's persecution of Christianity and execution of its chief exponent was probably due to an honest belief that the progress of Christianity jeopardised his position as Sethupathi. However, the Sethupathi's calculation was a failure for Christianity flourished in the Marava country even after the martyrdom of De Britto. He himself repented later on and sympathized with Christianity in his last days. Kilavan Sethupathi gave concessions to Christian Maravas too. They were also recruited to the army.⁹⁸ The stern action of Kilavan against Britto far from injuring his cause gained him strength and solidarity in the country. In another two years, he was able to consolidate the kingdom by his sound administration. He conciliated Tadia Thevar by granting more territory and concession and by appointing him; one of the chief advisers in the court.⁹⁹ The Marava cavalry chief who had embraced Christianity was replaced by a relative of the Sethupathi.¹⁰⁰

Thus his fear of the political consequence of the rapid spread of Christianity, the fanaticism of the people and the actions of the missionaries themselves were the factors which contributed to the martyrdom of Britto. In A.D. 1734 forty years after the

⁹⁷ J. H. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁹⁸ *Oriyur Church Records*. (Unpublished)

⁹⁹ *Mangaleswari Nachiar's suit for the right of Ramnad Palace property filed before the Hon'ble Company in A.D. 1795.*

¹⁰⁰ *Palm leaf records of Ramnad Samasthanam* (Unpublished). The descendants still enjoy the lands then given free of tax.

martyrdom of Britto, MuthuvijayaRaghunatha Setupati allowed a church to be built on the site where De Britto died. It is known as the church of our Lady of Health (Arockiamadha Koil) later modified in A.D. 1770 by the Italian missionary De Rossi.¹⁰¹ When the Original church was built the Setupati's brother-in-law carried bricks and stones on his head as a gesture of separation and thanks giving. The setupati's son, sister and several other relations became Christians. Fifty feet north of this church is the shrine of St.Britto on the exact spot where his head and mangled body were impaled. This is now joined by a corridor to the spacious new church built to commemorate his canonization. Despite its modernity Oriyur retains its old-world charm as the spirit of Britto invests it with an aura of complete serenity.

Kilavan's reign was remarkable for a plethora of public works undertaken by him. It was only he who transferred the capital from Pogalur to Ramanathapuram. He pulled down the mudwalls of Ramanathapuram and replaced them with solid stone fortification consisting of a strong wall 27 feet high and 5 feet thick surrounded by a deep ditch. In the centre of the fort was built the royal palace which still exists with its high extensive buildings.¹⁰² This palace became the royal residence from his time. In it he built a big hall called the Ramalinga vilasam and on the ceiling were painted pictures illustrative of the famous battle between the setupati and the Tanjore king. These are mural paintings which also depict the important events in the history of the setupati rule. A large number of them represent in colour stories from the epics and puranas.

He also dug out to the west of the palace and outside the palace wall the spacious reservoir called the 'Mugavai Urani'¹⁰³ and he improved it to collect the rain water to provide against the summer droughts. In return for this place of public work undertaken

¹⁰¹P. Vettivayal Valavan, *op.cit*, p.17.

¹⁰² S.M.kamal, *op.cit*, p.44.

¹⁰³ Interview, *S.M. Kamal*, Ramanathapuram, 10.10.2007.

by him, the people conferred on him the title of ‘Mugavai Urani Iyah’ signifying ‘Lord of the Tank of Mugavai Urani’. An inscription dated AD 1707 called Kilavan Sethupathi, the creator of the Raghunatha Samudra by daming the river Vaigai. These two lakes dug by the Sethupathi must have solved the difficulties of the cultivators to a great extent especially during summer. He is said to have given a portion of land sufficient to maintain 300 men to Periya Udaiya Thevar who thence forward was known as the Nalukottai Poligar. Another significant event in his reign was the signing of a treaty with the Dutch on 8th May 1694 by which the Dutch were compelled to give him sixty free Moorish stones and one day’s fishing as fee for the right to fish in the Gulf of Mannar irrespective of the size of the boats.

Though Kilavan Sethupathi was a man of many sided achievements, his last days were not happy,¹⁰⁴ for in the year AD 1709 the country suffered from extraordinary drought which brought about famine and an epidemic reducing it to extreme desolation. Nelson rightly remarks on the authority of a letter from Fr Martin dated AD 1713 that “the famine which raged at this time was not brought about by carelessness and improvidence on the part of the Sethupathi’s government or by the want of works of irrigation, but was attributable solely to a deficient rain fall. In consequence of this visitation of famine furiously than ever before in AD 1710 caused many emigrated to Thanjavur and Madurai.¹⁰⁵

It was at this hour of national disaster that Kilavan who had ruled the country so efficiently for nearly thirty-nine years passed away. A letter of Fr Martin dated AD 1713 states that the prince of Marava died in AD 1710 at the age of eighty¹⁰⁶ and the earliest inscription of his successor is dated in AD 1713¹⁰⁷ and so the date given by Fr Martin

¹⁰⁴ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ Raja Ram Rao, *op.cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁶ Nelson, *op.cit.*, pp. 241-42.

¹⁰⁷ Bertrand, *op. cit*, Vol. IV, p. 203.

might be correct. The death of Kilavan was followed by the burning of his forty-seven wives on his funeral pyre.¹⁰⁸

Thus Kilavan Sethupathi's reign was a memorable one in the history of the dynasty. Taking advantage of the weakness of Vijaya Ranga, many poligars showed signs of defection and independence. Kilavan was the first and foremost to do it. He performed the *Hiranyagarbha* sacrifice as testified by his grants in AD 1707 and AD 1712 to the Vyasaraaya mutt through his agent at Rameshwaram.¹⁰⁹ Fr Martin's letter of AD 1700 refers to the practical independence of the Sethupathi and his letter of AD 1713 states that he was feared by the neighbouring states.

Thiru Udaya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1710-20 AD)

Shortly before his death Kilavan Sethupathi had nominated one Bavani Sankara Thevan, an illegitimate son by a favourite concubine as his successor. But the Maravans did not approve of this nomination as the chronicle says "the mother of his son Bavani Sankara was not born of good caste."¹¹⁰ Then Thiru Udaya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi was crowned Sethupathi on a Vijayadasami day and this accounts for the prefix 'Vijaya' in his second name. According to the chronicle this event took place in AD 1722. This is wrong as the first inscription of this Sethupathi is dated AD 1713.

The writer in the Calcutta Review, Mackenzie and Pharoah and Co. assert that Bavani Sanakara was not nominated by Kilavan Sethupathi to succeed him and Raja Rama Rao also agrees with the view that "if Bavani Sankara had been nominated, he would not have allowed Vijaya Raghunatha to succeed without severe contest which does not appear to have occurred and the invasion by the Thanjavur king must mainly be

¹⁰⁸ Thiru Venkatachari, S. *The Sethupatis of Ramnad*, Karikudi, 1959, Pp. 31,446.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 244-46.

¹¹⁰ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

attributed to his desire to retrieve the disasters he sustained during Kilavan's reign."¹¹¹ Bavani Sankara knew fully well that the attempt to set him aside was a popular move and it was this factor that should have compelled him to accept the leadership of Vijaya Raghunatha. Again as Natarajan feels, it is not correct to say that the cause of Thanjavur invasion was only the ambition of the Thanjavur king. It appears from the Jesuit letters that this man was the younger son of Kilavan and brother of one Vaduganatha Thevan who had the right to the throne but gave up his rights in favour of his younger brother who he thought was more fit to be the king.¹¹² If the above statement is true it should add why Kilavan Sethupathi nominated his illegitimate son Bavani Sankara as his successor. As Sathianathaier rightly remarks, the Jesuits sometimes mistook the successors of a ruler for his sons, Sivagami Nachiar's pedigree states that they were the sons of Kilavan Sethupathi's sister woodayaka Nachiar but does not show which of them the elder. Raghunatha was probably chosen by Kilavan Sethupathi in preference to his brother because of his greater abilities and compliment of self-abnegation to Vaduganatha was perhaps uncalled for and due to a desire on the part of Jesuits to glorify one who was favourably disposed towards them.¹¹³ At the time of Vijaya Raghunatha's accession the condition of the Marava country was none too good. The Natural calamities which took place during the last days of Kilavan Sethupathi's reign had wrought considerable havoc and subjected the people to untold hardship. The Jesuit letters speak of harrowing tales of mothers eating their children, husbands bargaining away their wives for a few measure of rice and thousands dying of starvation. Naturally Raghunatha had first to turn his attention to the welfare of his people. He repaired and improved the irrigation works destroyed by the floods and greatly helped the people in making the lands cultivable once again. He constructed a lake called 'Raghunatha Samudram' very near Ramanathapuram.

¹¹¹ Ramnad manual, *op.cit.*, p. 234.

¹¹² J.H.Nelson, *op.cit.*, p. 247.

¹¹³ R.Sathianathan, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

As Raghunatha was constantly troubled by his rival Bavani Sankara he had to keep his forces in constant readiness for any military operations. As a measure of self-defence he divided his kingdom into eight revenue districts, each district consisting of several villages. In each village he appointed from Madurai an efficient accountant of the Vellala caste to keep regular accounts. This arrangement seems to have been quite popular and efficient and the vagaries of the old system were put an end to. In the place of financial chaos he introduced an orderly system and in the place of exaction definiteness of demand.¹¹⁴ He did not neglect the external defences of the country too and his military system ensured the safety and solidarity of his kingdom. It is said that he divided the kingdom into seventy-two military divisions (Palayams) placing each under a chief (Poligar) who rendered military services in lieu of tribute. A letter of Fr Martin dated AD 1713 describes the military organisation of the country as follows. "All villages and lands of Marava are possessed by the richest in the country in return for a certain number of soldiers they have to furnish to the prince whenever he required them. These lords keep their position at the prince's pleasures; their soldiers are their relatives, friends or slaves who cultivate the lands and take to arms when required. In this way the Marava can collect even thirty or forty thousand men in less than eight days; hence he is feared by the neighbouring princes."¹¹⁵ He also built forts at Rajasingamangalam, Kamudi and Pamban on the borders of his kingdom and garrisoned them in order to prevent any help coming from outside the country for the assistance of his enemies as well as to meet any threat from outside.¹¹⁶ It is said that the fort at Kamudi was built with the help of French engineers. Vijaya Raghunatha was aware of the intentions of the Maratha king to take back the areas lost to Kilavan Sethupathi and so he tightened security measures in and around Arantangi fort and area. The Sethupathi himself often

¹¹⁴ *IA*, 1917, p. 209.

¹¹⁵ Bertrand, *op.cit*, p. 200.

¹¹⁶ *Letter of Fr Martin SJ to Fr De Villette* dated 19th December, 1913. (Shenbaganur Archives)

visited Arantangi fort and stayed there.¹¹⁷ According to the Jesuit records the reason for the security measures was to suppress the growing influence of Christianity.¹¹⁸ But what Rangachari says seems to be the more appropriate reason. The Sethupathi also organised an artillery division with the assistance of the Dutch with whom he was on friendly terms. His two massive guns called Rama and Lakshmana named after the epic heroes, were a tower of strength to his side and a source of terror to his foes. No wonder as Natarajan thinks, he was able to reign supreme from Tiruvallur in the North to Tirunelveli in the south. He left no stone unturned in keeping the country in tact and in taking precautionary measures against internal revolt as well against external aggression.¹¹⁹ Luckily, the Setupati was free from any disturbance from Madurai. Madurai after the crushing defeat suffered at the hands of Kilavan in AD 1708, did not interfere in the Marava affairs. The political stability of Madurai far from improving was deteriorating,¹²⁰ despite all these precautions Bavani Sankara managed to take some territory near Pudukkottai.

Another notable event of his reign was that Kallars raided into his kingdom and carried off two thousand heads of cattle. He immediately established nine fortresses into their country, lulled them into security by various promises and then massacred a number of them in cold blood. They afterwards paid their respects annually but they continued to be independent of Madurai government until AD 1772.¹²¹

Another significant event of this reign was the rise into prominence of the Nalkottai family. Sasivarna Thevar otherwise known as Nalukottai Udaya Thevar from being the possessor of four fortresses somehow won the favour of Vijaya Raghunatha.

¹¹⁷ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit*, p.53.

¹¹⁸ Vijaya Raghunatha's elder brother who was in charge of Arantani was a sympathiser of Christianity, Letter of Fr Bernard, dt. 17.03.1712.

¹¹⁹ S.Natarajan, *op.cit*, p. 88.

¹²⁰ R.Sathianathaier, *op.cit*, p. 220.

¹²¹ Nelson, *op.cit*, p. 45.

Vijaya Raghunatha gave his illegitimate daughter named Akilandeswari Nachiar in marriage to him and he also gave him a dowry of lands sufficient to maintain thousand men. This originated the Sivagangai Samasthanam.

About the year AD 1720 the Raja of Pudukkottai induced by Bavani Sankara entered into an alliance with the king of Thanjavur and declared war on the Marava county.¹²² The Sethupathi marched to Arantangi to meet the allied force. While he was fighting his enemies an epidemic broke out in the camp and took a heavy toll of the Marava. The king himself became a victim of it and he was carried home sick from the battle-field. He at first showed some signs of recovery but shortly afterwards succumbed. An inscription dated 8.8.1642 Vikari (AD 1720) records the digging of a Suryapushkarani for the merit of Muthu Vayiravanatha Sethupathi Kattaya Thevar.¹²³ The Ramanathapuram Manual gives the date as AD 1725 and Rangacharya in Indian Antiquary says that he died in AD 1723. The contemporary Jesuit letter gives the date as AD 1720. This could be taken as the more reliable authority. Rangacharya allows ten years for Bavani Sankara but then says his rule ended in AD 1730. He himself contradicts his statement.

Like his predecessor Vijaya Raghunatha was a devout Saivite. He was greatly devoted to Ramanathaswami. He frequented Rameshwaram and made numerous gifts to the temple. The construction of a big car (*ratham*) and the initiation of the car festival are attributed to him. He is said to have performed the *Hiranyagarbha Yagam* and he endowed the Kothanda Ramaswami temple in Ramanathapuram. He granted several *dharmasanams* (grants) to the Brahmins. He not only made additions to the great temple of Rameshwaram, but he constantly attended it in person. Whatever state business required his attention at the public offices in Ramanathapuram, he would never deny

¹²² Sewell, *op.cit*, p. 90.

¹²³ V.Rangacharya, *Inscriptions of Madras Presidency*, Vol.II, Madras, 1919, p. 1197.

himself the privilege of evening religious exercise there and by keeping constant relays of horse posted along the heavy sand, the whole distance between Ramanathapuram and Tonittorai and coasts beyond, he managed to reach Rameshwaram temple before sunset (a distance of about 37 miles). He carefully looked after the comforts and safety of the pilgrims to Rameshwaram. To assist them he appointed his own son-in-law, to whom he had married his two daughters born to his senior wife to the command of the Pamban port with orders that he should assist the pilgrims in their passage over the channel and afterwards in their weariness march across to Dhanuskodi.¹²⁴

Though he was a devout saivite, his attitude towards Christianity was very favourable from the beginning. Soon after his accession some missionaries got his permission to erect a church in his kingdom. He is said to have supplied them with necessary material for the construction of the church. By AD 1711 a beautiful church had been erected in the heart of the Marava country. But unfortunately for the Christians the king seems to have given up his policy of toleration and some letters after AD 1711 complaint of bad treatment. But the missionaries did not lose heart and hope for Vaduganatha, the Sethupathi's elder brother whom they had converted before the Sethupathi's accession was a source of encouragement to them. He received Fr Martin with respect and apologised for the bad treatment from the Sethupathi. Encouraged by this, the missionaries carried on their activities with aplomb and soon they succeeded in converting many people to their religion. But an impolitic act of one of the new converts brought matters to a crisis. Once when the Sethupathi had been to Rameshwaram his brother-in-law Tiruvaluanathan visited the church and participated in the ceremonies.¹²⁵ When the Sethupathi heard this he was very much enraged and vowed to crush all

¹²⁴ Raja ram Rao, *op.cit*, p. 236.

¹²⁵ Bertrand, *op.cit*, p. 233.

missionary activities. He issued orders to enter the houses of the Christians and destroy all traces of their faith.¹²⁶

He maintained this hostile attitude until his death so much so that when he passed away a Jeusit writer referred to it as ‘the favour of Divine Providence’. However, the Sethupathi was very popular and he had the wholehearted support of his people until he breathed his last. Vijaya Raghunatha is said to have married not less than three hundred and sixty wives and to have had as many as a hundred children born to him by them and by various concubines and yet he left no heir of his body. All his legitimate children seem to have been carried off by disease and the Jesuits sincerely believed that his misfortunes were due to his cruelty towards Christianity.¹²⁷

Sundareswara alias Tanda Thevar (1720 AD) and Bavani Sankara (1720-29)

Kilavan Sethupathi had no son so he nominated Tanda Thevar his eldest sister’s son as his successor.¹²⁸ The accession of the new Sethupathi was hotly contested by Bavani Sankara who had been prevented from succeeding Kilavan Sethupathi because his mother was not of high caste. The situation was not quite unfavourable to Bavani Sankara. He ruled for 4 months only because there was a dispute among his relatives.¹²⁹ Bavani Sankara (the son of a concubine of Kilawan Sethupathi) also claim throne. Tanda Thevar met Bavani Sankara with the help of Tondaiman and the Madurai Nayak in Arantangi Bavani Sankara was frightened and ran away to Thanjavur.¹³⁰ Then Tanda Thevar became the Sethupathi of Ramanathapuramu. But Bavani Sankara sought help of the king of Thanjavur by promising to give him land of north Pamban in case he was restored to power¹³¹ with the able assistance of the Thanjavur King, Bavani Sankara

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 235.

¹²⁷ Nelson, *op.cit.*, p. 248.

¹²⁸ IA 1917, p. 211.

¹²⁹ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit*, p. 55.

¹³⁰ *Modi Manuscripts*, Political Bundle No. 7, S. No. 91, Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal library.

¹³¹ *Advaita Kirtana*, a Tamil Ms. No.631 preserved in the Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Library.

invaded Ramanathapuram once again within two or three months after the treaty was concluded between him and the Raja of Thanjavur.¹³² Tanda Thevar on his part sought and obtained the help of the Madurai Nayak and Tondaiman once again. The Nayak of Nadars or more probably one of his ministers had sent a small body of men to protect the northern frontier of Ramanathapuram, while the Tondaiman troops in motion and finally encamped there at a little distance from his allies.¹³³ Bavani Sankara met Tanda Thevar with the help of Thanjavur general Anandarao Peshwa in Vellore.

Finally Bavani Sankara defeated Tanda Thevar and put him to death.¹³⁴ Bavani Sankara became the ruler of Ramanathapuram. He ruled for nine years. His corrupt administration only hastened his fall. Further he quarreled with the poligars who were the props and pillars of the administration of his predecessors. He drove out Sasivarana Periya Udaiya Thevar a famous poligar; Sasivarma Periya Udaiya Thevar met Kattaya Thevar (the uncle of Tanda Thevar). Both these planned to drive out Bavani Sankara from Ramanathapuram. Kattaya Thevar, Sasivarma Tudaiya Thevar got support from the king of Thanjavur, because Bavani Sankara had not kept his word in 1729. The allied forces defeated Bavani Sankara at Uraiur. He was then taken prisoner to Thanjavur where he breathed his last. The Thanjavur forces captured north of Pamban. The rest of the kingdom was divided into five parts. Three were given to Kattaya Thevar and other two were given to Sasivarma Periya Udaiya Thevar who became the founder of the Sivaganga. Kattaya Thevar (1729-36) ascended the throne in 1729.¹³⁵

¹³² *Ramnath Christian – Mackenzie collections*, Unpublished Mss. Library, Madras.

¹³³ Nelson, *op.cit.*, p. 248.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 249.

¹³⁵ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

Katta or Kattaya Thevar alias Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi

[1729-35]

Katta Thevar alias Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi ascended the throne of Ramanathapuram in AD 1729 after parcelling out of Ramanathapuram.¹³⁶ He came to be known as Periya or Elder Maravan.

As soon as he became the Sethupathi, Ramanathapuram kingdom was troubled by an invasion from Thanjavur. The reasons for the war are not known. Ponnuswamy Thevar in his memorandum submitted to Nelson states that the Sethupathi in alliance with the Raja of Sivaganga invaded Thanjavur with a view to recovering from the Thanjavur Raja the lands given to him according to the treaty of AD 1729. But the Jesuit authorities make everybody to believe that Thanjavur was the aggressor. Having gathered an army, he marched against King Katta Thevar whom he had helped three years previously to be placed on the throne of Ramanathapuram. He pretended to reestablish the throne Bavani Sankara whom he had dethroned three years before. In reality he wanted to secure for his son the crown of Marava and conquer the whole country, one third of which already paid homage to him. This passage proves conclusively that the Sethupathi should not be accused of a 'diagraceful breach of faith',¹³⁷ and it was the Thanjavur Raja, Tukkoji and brother and successor of Serfoji that precipitated the war. Again the statement in the same letter that Katta Thevar had neither arms nor soldiers proves to the hint that the Sethupathi could not be termed the aggressor.

Katta Thevar was in a poor plight as he had neither soldiers nor arms sufficient to fight the invaders but luckily for him he had a friend in the enemies' camp. A prince

¹³⁶ Besse.L., *Father Beschi – His times and his writings*, St. Joseph,s Industrial School Press, Tiruchirappalli, 1918, p.134.

¹³⁷ J. H. Nelson, *op. cit*, p. 292.

called Pandaram who was a tributary of the Thanjavur ruler warned Katta Thevar not to yield and defend himself by all means without losing hope. Kattays Thevar therefore hid himself in the fortress of Ramanathapuram. The forces of Thanjavur marched to Ramanathapuram, set fire to villages and subjected the people on the way to the utmost cruelty by killing them and burning their property. But the Maravas who were adepts in the art of using artillery to their advantage made use of it to create commotion in the enemy's camp. This discouraged the Thanjavurians very much. So the siege dragged on for a long time. Finally one impolitic act of the Thanjavur prince ruined his cause. Suspecting that prince Pandaram was plotting against his father, the Thanjavur prince treacherously murdered Pandaram and had his corpse dragged through the streets. The auxiliary troops were increased at this mischievous crime. Separated themselves from the army and joined the troops of the late Pandaram, under the leadership of his son who cut off all the roads leading to Thanjavur and besieged the whole army. Everything was paralysed. The army was about to take to flight. But the Marava closed all passages and there was no way of escape. Had not Katta Thevar magnanimously allowed the Thanjavur forces to escape, they would have perished miserably. The king of Thanjavur had to renounce that part of the Marava country which he had previously acquired in AD 1729.¹³⁸ This put an end to Tukkoji's territorial expansion southwards.

In AD 1734 Tukkoji sent his forces under Ananda Rao, his famous General against Pudukottai. In a few days Ananda Rao easily occupied most of the state and besieged Tirumayam, the strongest fort of the country. The Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram fearing that the fall of Tirumayam would jeopardise his interests hastened to the aid of the besieged. In consequence the siege of Tirumayam became protracted.¹³⁹ The Sethupathi's forces adopted guerrilla warfare tactics. They hid

¹³⁸ M.C. 1771, Vol.41, Pp.107-109.

¹³⁹ *Annual letter of the Madurai Mission*, 14th July, 1735.

themselves in the jungles around and attacked the enemies in darkness during nights at unexpected hours. These raids were very successful as they created great hardships in the enemy's camp. Some bands of Maravas even managed to enter the fortress and this act added courage to the besieged. Meanwhile the queen of Madurai was alarmed at the schemes of Ananda Rao, revoked her agreement with him and recalled her forces. But undaunted the General continued the siege with greater vigour. At last news reached him that his help was wanted at Thanjavur which had been invaded by the Mughals and the Madruaians who began hostilities in response to the pressing invitations of the rulers of Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai. Losing all hopes of conquering Tirumayam, he hurriedly collected his forces and retreated to Thanjavur to meet the new enemies.

In keeping with the tradition of his dynasty, Kattaya Thevar was very liberal in his religious and charitable endowments. He constructed the Thangachimadam choultry in the island of Rameshwaram and Tittanadanam Chatram near Tiruvadana. The Balasubramania Swami temple in Rameshwaram owes its existence to him. Temples at Rameshwaram, Kilakarai, Tiruppulani and Tiruttaragosamangai were also richly endowed. He granted about twenty villages to the Brahmins as *dharmasanams*. Two of his leading civil servants, Pradanis as they were called, Ramalinga Pillai and Vairavan Pillai who were in charge of the revenue administration of the country built temples respectively at Kulavayal and Peruvayal and got them endowed by the Sethupathi.

Nelson states that Kattaya Thevar died in AD 1752. But this date is wrong in the light of the date furnished by the chronicle and inscriptions. The chronicle of the Act of the Sethupathi states that Kattaya Thevar died after ruling for six years from 08.08.1650 (AD 1728). The last inscription of this king is dated in 08.08.1657 (AD 1735) and the first inscription of his successor is dated in 08.08.1658, Nala (AD 1786).¹⁴⁰ So, Katta Thevar must have died in AD 1735 and not in AD 1752 as stated by Nelson.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Sewell, *op.cit*, p. 275.

¹⁴¹ S.Natarajan, *op.cit*, p. 101.

Sivakumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (AD 1735-1747)

Rakka Thevar

Sivakumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, the son of Kattaya Thevar succeeded him to the throne in AD 1736.¹⁴² The Chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathis makes no mention of this Sethupathi for reasons unknown. He was called 'Saiva Durai' as he was a vegetarian. He had a minister by name Vellayan Servaikaar. He seems to have been a man of great energy and ability and to have succeeded in getting all the power of the Ramanathapuram government into his own hands. This Sethupathi's rule was uneventful and undisturbed by any wars. He seems to have helped the trustee of Madurai Mennakshi temple and Koodalazhagar temple to conduct pujas for nearly two and a half years to the Utsava idols at Mana Madurai after having brought them there fearing that Chanda Sahib would take them away.¹⁴³ He continued the charitable works of his predecessors. He endowed the choultries and temples with a great number of villages. He also gave to Brahmins certain villages as *Dharmasasanam*. He built new choultries at Pamban, Akkalmadam and Rameshwaram and richly endowed them.

Nelson states that this Sethupathi died after a rule of a few days. This error as Natarajan states is due to the initial mistake of dating the death of Kattaya Thevar in AD 1752. The last inscription of this reign is dated in AD 1746.¹⁴⁴ The Chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathis states that Rakka Thevar was crowned in AD 1747.¹⁴⁵ Hence it is probable that this Sethupathi ruled till AD 1747 in which he died after ruling for twelve years.

¹⁴² Burgess and Natesa Sastri, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, Madras, 1886, p. 95.

¹⁴³ R.Sathyanathaier, *History of the Madurai Nayaks*, Madurai Oxford University, Madras, 1924, pp. 378-79.

¹⁴⁴ Sewell, *op.cit*, p. 309.

¹⁴⁵ Taylor William, *op.cit*, p. 57.

Soon after the death of Saiva Durai, his minister Vellan or Vellayan Servaikaran nominated Rakka Thevar, a cousin of Kattaya Thevar as his successor. Soon after the accession of this Sethupathi, the Raja of Thanjavur invaded the Ramanathapuram but the Dalavai Vellayan Servaikaran had succeeded in defeating the invader. The Dalavai then made an expedition to the south with a view to reducing the poligar to submission and to restore peace throughout the Madurai kingdom. It is said that he subdued all the poligars except the poligar of Ettayapuram, who was spared probably because the Sethupathi venerated him as a Guru.¹⁴⁶ These successes greatly enhanced his power and prestige and turned his head. The Sethupathi became a tool in his hands. The Dalavai became a virtual dictator. It appears from Nelson's account based on Ponnuswamy Thevan's memorandum that in order to show his superiority over those whom he defeated he liked other Dalavais used to cause mud to be prepared and thrown on the ground in front of his seat and compelled the poligars who came to pay their respects to him to prostrate themselves full length in the mud on approaching the presence. The cruel acts of the Dalavai made him unpopular and an intrigue resulted in an attempt to ruin the successful Dalavai. The intriguers induced the Sethupathi to recall the Dalavai from Tirunelveli. But he turned the tables on his adversaries as and rebelled against the Sethupathi who had to flee for safety to the fort of Pamban. The Dalavai however, pursued and imprisoned him. He then deposed him and placed on the throne a member of Kilavan's family named Sella or Vijaya Raghunatha Thevar¹⁴⁷ but the Chronicle of the Acts of the Sethupathi says that Rakka Thevar's unpopularity led to his fall. Probably, as Natarajan thinks, the chronicle does not want to record a deposition by a Dalavai as it would tarnish the reputation of the royal family.¹⁴⁸ According to the chronicle, this incident happened in AD 1748.

¹⁴⁶ Vadivelu, *The Ruling Chiefs, Nobels and Zamindars of India*, G. Clongamnadhen, Bros., Madras, 1915, pp. 596-597.

¹⁴⁷ S.Natarajan, *op.cit*, p. 598.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 103.

Sella Thevar alias Vijya Raghunatha Sethupathi (AD 1748-61)

Sella Thevar was aunt's grand son to Sivakumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi. He became the Sethupathi in AD 1748 and he ruled for thirteen years, six months and nine days.¹⁴⁹ He showed loyalty to the fallen ruler of Madurai. The Nayak of Madurai was at this time taking shelter in the Marava country from where he tried to regain the kingdom. Things seem to be favourable to him Chanda Sahib who had been his enemy now tried his best to befriend him and entrusted his lieutenant with the task of restoring Vijaya Kumara, the son of the deceased Bangaru Tirumalai to the Nayakship. He proceeded to Ramanathapuram and had an interview with Vellayan Servaikaran and both planned the course of action. Vijaya Kumara was taken to Madurai and to the immense joy of all he was crowned in the traditional manner before Goddess Meenakshi.¹⁵⁰ But he was not destined to rule for long. Two years later, Chanda Sahib was captured and murdered and Muhamed Ali became the master of the Carnatic. Muhamed Ali was an enemy of Vijaya Kumara and he now planned to remove the Nayak. He induced Muda Miyan, the son-in-law of Mayana to kill his master. But Muda Miyan's brother Hussain Khan advised him not to commit this heinous crime. As he did not pay any heed to his advice, he informed the Nayak of the plan of Miyan. The Nayak fled to Vellikuruchi in the Sivaganga Zamindar. The Sethupathi felt that Vellikuruchi was not a safe place of refuge because of its proximity to Madurai and so called him away with lightning rapidity to *Dharbasayanam* or Tiruppullanai where he built for him a palace. He also ceded to the Nayak the village called Virasolan and furnished him with the household utensils. The Sethupathi had soon to face the hostility of Muhmad Ali. The latter desires of completely ruining the Nayak, sent an army against Ramanathapuram to seize the fugitive king. Informed of this by his agent, the Nayak

¹⁴⁹ Raja Ram Rao, *op.cit.*, p.243.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.254.

made good of his escape. Records are silent as to what happened to Muhamad Ali's forces.

The traditional enmity between Ramanathapuram and Thanjavur continued on the Arantangi frontier. In 1749 Raja Pratap Singh sent an expedition under his able General Manomi (Manakji) to acquire the Arantangi fort from the control of Sethupathi. Manoji acting in concert with the Tondaiman of Pudukkottai is said to have successfully captured the fort. But Nelson gives a different version of the results of the expedition. He says that Sethupathi's Dalavai Vellayan Servaikaran defeated the Thanjavur forces and drove them back. Nelson's account seems to be more reliable. A letter addressed to the king of Thanjavur on the 27th March 1756 says that Thanjavur army was in readiness to march into the Maravar country and take possession of certain districts which belonged to him before the war. Fortunately, the proposed invasion of Ramanathapuram never fructified. The presidency wrote to the Raja "as this is a time of peace, I think it would be more advisable to endeavour to settle this affair amicably for fear of occasioning new trouble".

The Presidency in all its correspondence insisted upon the restoration of the lands claimed by the Thanjavur king. But the Sethupathi was evasive in his reply. So the king of Thanjavur and Tondaiman joined together and attacked Ramanathapuram. The English also now sided with the allied forces. They finally succeeded in taking the fort and the country through the means of Captain Caillaud. Sometime after this by the end of AD 1757 Manoji Rao is said to have besieged the fort of Armogam belonging to the Maravar. But when they attacked to take the fort by storm, those within the fort stubbornly resisted them and drove them back to their camp. They then attacked the camp itself and defeated the Thanjavurans and seized from them a flag and three guns which they over-charged. Seven or eight hundred men seem to have been killed and wounded on both sides.

From the year AD 1749, the Sethupathi and the Tondaiman were constantly quarrelling on the northern frontier of the Pudukkottai state. In these disputes the Sethupathi had the backing of the French in the early stages and the Tondaiman had the backing of both the English and the Nawab. A letter from Anwarudy Khan states that the Maravar is the enemy of the Tondaiman. The Tondaiman requested to assist him with 200 sepoy and soldiers which will strike terror in the Maravar. He is preparing his own troops. The Nawab taking into consideration the selfless services rendered to him in the past by the Tondaiman pressed the presidency to go to the rescue of the Tondaiman. Luckily an open rupture between Ramanathapuram and Pudukkottai rulers was averted by the presidency. Major Lawrence was not appreciative of this dispute as he thought it would lead to fresh complications and trouble. So Ram Naick, the agent of the presidency was sent to Pudukkottai to appease the Tondaiman and to ask him not to wage any war. In June 1754 the Thanjavur General Manoji successfully effected a compromise between these two warring powers. But it proved to be a temporary truce, for the Tondaiman joined the Thanjavur king in attacking Ramanathapuram in AD 1755. The Tondaiman even went one step further. He opposed firmly all alliances of the English and the Nawab with the Sethupathi and maintained the same hostile attitude to the end. In AD 1757, when the Nawab wanted to punish the Sethupathi for the help rendered by him to Chanda Sahib, the Tondaiman sent a thousand men against the Maravas. The relations between the Sethupathi and the Tondaiman were again strained in the year AD 1760.¹⁵¹

The Sethupathi did not follow any definite policy in his dealing with the Europeans. South India was at this time in the grip of a great civil war between the old dynasty of Nawab, the family of Sadabat Sultan and the family of Anwaruddin Khan and his son Nawab Wallajah Muhammad Ali which ultimately turned out to be a war for the

¹⁵¹ S.M.Kamal, *op.cit.*, Pp.60-62.

mastery of southern India between the French and the English. Almost all these states of south India participated in this war and naturally the Sethupathi was dragged into it. He first joined the French and Chanda Sahib and Robert Orme tells us that he despatched 400 peons and colleries (Kallara) to the assistance of Chanda Sahib in AD 1752.¹⁵² But the successive defeats of Chanda Sahib and the French and their allies convinced the Sethupathi that nothing could be gained by siding with the French. So he began negotiations for treaty with the English and when Col. Heron was in Madurai in AD 1755 he sent a deputation to wait on him. He apologised for having sided with the French and the Mysoreans in their wars against the English and requested to be received into alliance. Heron accepted the offer of the Marava king with the consent of the Nawab Muhammad Ali.¹⁵³ The Sethupathi was much delighted at the success of the mission and at the offer of three English flags to be hoisted in his country. As a further proof of his good will to the English, he sent 5000 men under the command of his brother Subbaraya Thevar to assist the English.¹⁵⁴ But, Thanjavur torpedoed the calculations of the Sethupathi with a view to recover his territory from the Marava king. Pratap Singh, the king of Thanjavur entered into an alliance with the Tondaiman of Pudukkottai in February, 1755 and the combined forces consisting of 1500 horses, 2000 sepoy marched towards Arantangi. Muhammad Ali was anxious to suppress the rebels in Madurai and Tirunelveli and at the same time to check the expansion of Thanjavur. So he asked the Raja of Thanjavur to postpone the execution of his design. The Nawab promised that he would get Arantangi for the Thanjavurans by negotiation. The Nawab's request was turned down, but the Thanjavur forces that invaded were beaten back by the Madurai troops though the Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram successfully repulsed the Thanjavur attacks on his northern border. Further, the Nawab had not officially accepted

¹⁵² Orme, R.A *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, Vol.I, 4th Edition, London, 1861, p,208.

¹⁵³ M.C. 1755, 18th January, Vol.V, p.21.

¹⁵⁴ M.C.1755, 4th March, Vol.V, p.48.

him as his ally. Therefore to secure his friendship, the Sethupathi offered the grant of two settlements on the East coast to the British which would give them access from Madurai to Tirunelveli by sea. The offer was so tempting that Heron had no hesitation in accepting it.

The Nawab however did not give his consent to Heron and insisted on getting back the territories occupied by the Maravas of Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga. The matter was referred to the Council of Madras.¹⁵⁵ The Rajas of Thanjavur and Pudukkottai protested vehemently and attacked this alliance and they supported the Nawab's stand. The committee disapproved Heron's actions and directed the Rajas of Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga to restore the territory of Thanjavur as a prerequisite to their alliance with the company and the Nawab. Heron was however instructed to proceed with caution to avoid future trouble.¹⁵⁶ Thus the Marava chief scored a major diplomatic success. It is true that he did not succeed in getting the alliance of the Nawab and the company, but his real intention was to safeguard his independence which was threatened by the Nawab and the Raja of Thanjavur.

But subsequently when the English and the Nawab were troubled in Tirunelveli district they sought the help of the Sethupathi and the Sethupathi readily helped them with men and money.¹⁵⁷ Again in AD 1758 the presidency wrote to the Sethupathi seeking his help against the French and the Sethupathi readily responded.¹⁵⁸ Thus it is crystal clear that though the first attempt at an alliance with the English proved futile, the English later had to seek the help of the Sethupathi in times of troubles. This cordiality continued till the end of his reign.

¹⁵⁵ M.C.1755, Vol.3, p.63.

¹⁵⁶ M.C.1755, 26th March, Vol.V, Pp.50-52

¹⁵⁷ M.C.1757, Vol.I, p.10.

¹⁵⁸ M.C.1757, Vol.I, p.92.

The Dutch were moving heaven and earth at this period to secure a permanent footing in the country, but they could not succeed in their endeavour. About the year AD 1706, a Dutch Embassy waited upon Kilavan Sethupathi and got from him permission to place a garrison at Pamban to prevent European vessels from sailing coastwise by that passage. But soon misunderstanding between the Sethupathi and the Dutch arose on the question of smuggling arecanut and the company was compelled to pull down its factory at Kilakarai. But this quarrel was patched up about AD 1747 and the factory was rebuilt. Eleven years after this, Sella Thevar attacked the factory and seized the Dutch vessels on the coast. The Dutch now tried to win some concessions from him by sending him large presents of cash and cloths. They sought permission to erect a factory at Kilakarai and asked for a reduction in the custom duties. A treaty concluded with him perhaps in AD 1757 conceded the above demands. They then built factories at Kilakarai and enclosed them with a fence of thorns. Sometime later the Dutch attempted to replace the fence of thorns with mud walls. This angered the Sethupathi who ordered them to be imprisoned. The Dutch now realised their folly and apologised to the Sethupathi for their conduct and to pacify him, they gave him further presents of silks and other articles. They were subsequently forgiven and allowed to carry on their trade. But in January 1758, a *dhoney* (boat) without permit was seized by the Dutch cruisers of Mannar and was found to be laden with dry arecanuts, rice, paddy and sinedy oil (gingelly oil) belonging to the statement of Tindal, a native petty officer of Iascare, or an on board ship to a certain maniar at Kotapattinam and destined for Rameshwaram. There also appeared at Mannar certain individuals who without any credentials insolently demanded the said *dhoney* in the name of the Katta Thevar.¹⁵⁹ But the Dutch detained the *dhoney* expecting that sells Thevar would address the Tuticorin officers regarding the same. But contrary to their expectation, he detained a Mannar cruising *dhoney* sent to Kilakarai on the 5th May, and when the Dutch residents at Kilakarai lodged a complaint, the Sethupathi

¹⁵⁹ Raja Ram Rao, *op.cit.*, p.243

answered them in a brutal and threatening manner. Thereupon the Tuticorin officers sent immediately two armed troops and one *dhoney* as well as one Sergeant, one Corporal and twenty-four pirates to Kilakarai in order to counteract any move on the part of the Sethupathi to force the Dutch resident to abandon the factory. The Dutch sent an urgent *Olai* to the Sethupathi protesting against at the injury and provocation caused to the company for some years past and particularly at the moment by the Thevar and his ministers.

In the meantime, the Thevar seized a second Mannar crushing *dhoney* which had come to Rameshwaram in order to obtain information regarding the first and at the same time 300 or 400 men occupied a position behind the Dutch factory in order to cut the Dutch off from water and firewood. Following that, the Tuticorin officers sent an armed bloop with three cruise *dhoneys* to the north in order to cruise there and the Thevar's people later erected two batteries on the island of Pamban and by threats as well as by strong garrisons more and more prevented the Dutch from supplying provisions.

On the 6th June, the Dutch Government ordered that all the Thevar's vessels down to and including fishing *dhoneys* should be seized and brought away. In the meantime the Thevar's people erected a benting or Malay field-work mounted with artillery behind the factory at Kilakarai and on the 18th June fired with cannon at the sloops laying at anchor before Kilakarai the commander of one of the vessels and a sailor. They also set fire to the 'negaries' or quarters of the *Pareas* (Parayas) and *Paraeas* (Paravas) surrounded the factory and challenged the Dutch residents saying that as they had sent for shifs and military to war with them that could serve as the beginning.

The president sent the interpreter and the *kannakkapillai* (accounts clerk) of Pambe (Pamban) together with an Arachchi or non-commissioned officer and two

Lascarians to the chiefs of the Thevar's people in order to settle the dispute. The Thevar's people insisted upon the appearance of the residents in person before them if they should have peace. Then the president hoping for a peaceful settlement went over accompanied by the Assistant Sergeant, interpreter and a few lascarians carrying with them a white flag. But contrary to their expectation they were all arrested. The Thevar then sealed up the company's warehouses, carried away as prisoners the residents as well as women and children and placed in chains by couples, the military, the native servants and some of the *dhoney* folk.

The Dutch Government received news of this fatal incident on the 10th of July and decided thereupon to close the straits of Pamban with a view to depriving the Thevar of the tolls which he levied on passing vessels, also to cruise along his coasts to prevent all fishing and diving for chanks, further to seize in arrest all his vessels, goods and subjects wherever possible and to place the latter in chains without any distinction whatsoever. With that object in view, the Dutch sent to the west a detachment composed of four Sergeants, four Corporals and fifty European pirates together with an armoured and six sailors as well as thirty Boeginess and their officers under the command of a Lieutenant and armed the sloop in which they sailed with four cannons and four swivels. They also ordered to officers at Tuticorin not only to arm the sloops there as well as possible and to provide them with the necessary personnel but also to handover to the said Lieutenant and the administrator there the command of all vessels, the military and the marine and to provide them with the necessary instructions and orders so as to give effect in the most efficient manner possible to the above decision, but as soon as the Dutch cruises.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.58-59.

Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi (AD1761-1772, 1780-1794)

Sella Thevar died leaving behind no sons and so his sister's son Muthu Ramalinga Thevar nearly two months old was proclaimed the Sethupathi. As he was only an infant, his mother Muthu Thiruvayee Nachiar acted as his Regent. But Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha the uncle of Muthu Ramalinga assumed the office of Regent, while Damodaran Pillai continued to be the *Pradhani* or *Dalavai*. The people did not approve of the regency of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha as his rule was very oppressive. Damodaran Pillai who was the favourite of the people and who added to the defence of Ramanathapuram fort and erected a fort at Tiruppullanai was not cared for by the *de facto* ruler, who was trying to become the *de jure* ruler.¹⁶¹ The regent was intriguing with the disgruntled minor chiefs with a view to dethroning the boy-king. With a view to carrying the favour of the Christians, the Regent granted *kaval* rights to the Christians Maravar of Oriyur and granted tax-free lands to the Oriyur and Irudayakoil Churches.¹⁶² Damaodaran Pillai understood the designs of the Regent and was hatching counter-plans to thwart them. He tried to turn the people against the Regent by taking advantage of the discontent of the people with the Regent's some taxes. The Regents was bent upon getting rid of Damodaran Pillai. But he was afraid of his poularity. So he waited for a suitable opportunity. That opportunity presented itself when the Nawab requested him for assistance against Yusuf Khan. The Regent immediately sent Damodaran Pillai to the troops to assist the Nawab against Yusuf Khan so that he might be away from Ramanathapuram.¹⁶³ Damodaran Pillai was quick to realize the evil designs of the regent. To counteract them he entered into a secret agreement with his counterpart Thandavaraya Pillai of Sivaganga who was on a similar mission. This agreement was

¹⁶¹ Sayalgudi Zamin Records, *Correspondence with Damodaran Pillai*, Unpublished Olai.

¹⁶² *French letter* dated April, 1763 of the Parish priest, Oriyur to the Madurai Mission headquarters. (Shenbaganur Archives)

¹⁶³ MC 12th December 1763, Vol. 19, p. 708.

tacitly approved by Muthu Vaduganatha Periya Udaya Thevar, the king of Sivaganga who was a close relative of the Ramanathapuram king.¹⁶⁴

In the meantime, the Regent in order to deprive the *Pradhani* of his control over the army made the British understand that his minister was trying to become independent and hence should be removed from the command. But the Regent without waiting for any reply from the British imprisoned Muthu Ramalingam and his mother along with several other noble families who would be of help to them.¹⁶⁵ But Damodaran Pillai was not a silent spectator. With the help of Sivaganga, he occupied most of the territories of Ramanathapuram and tried to capture the capital in order to enthrone the boy-king. But he did not succeed.¹⁶⁶ Both Damodaran Pillai and Thandavaraya Pillai met Major Preston in December 1763 when he was engaged in the military operations against the rebels of Madurai and sought his help against the Regent stressing that they would assist the English only if the English were prepared to give all military aid against the Regent and reinstate the boy-king as Sethupathi who was still in jail.¹⁶⁷ When Preston asked the Nawab to advise him on this the Nawab with a view to concentrating on the rebels at Madurai advised Preston to utilize the services of the ministers against the rebels and at the same time not to march on the Regent immediately. Preston enlisted the help of the ministers of Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga on condition of his future help for the occupation of Ramanathapuram. With their help, Preston reduced Madurai to submission.

After the fall of Madurai, Damodaran Pillai and his supporters the chiefs of Sayalgudi, Muthugalathur, Tiruppuvanam and Sethupuram openly rose in revolt against the Regent's administration declaring that they would accept only Muthu Ramalingam as

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.63.

¹⁶⁵ MC 8th January 1764, Vol. 20, pp. 12-15.

¹⁶⁶ MC 1st November 1763, Vol. 19, pp. 644-665.

¹⁶⁷ *Major Preston to Robert Palk* dt. 20th Dec. 1763 & *Preston to Council* in MC Vol. 20-A, pp. 12-15.

Sethupathi. In the meantime Damodaran Pillai was preparing for an attack on Ramanathapuram with the help of Sivaganga, the Nawab and the British.¹⁶⁸ The regent with a view to putting an end to the machinations of Damordaran Pillai also appealed to Muhammad Ali for help. Muhammad Ali promised to help the Regent too on condition that the Regent agreed to the stationing of two Carnatic companies within the fort of Ramanathapuram apparently for its defence.¹⁶⁹ This would mean digging in of the Nawab's as well as British authority in Ramanathapuram. But the sudden demise of the Regent as a result of an attack of small-pox spoiled their chances.

On hearing the death of the Regent the ministers hastened back to Ramanathapuram without the knowledge of either the Nawab or Preston with a view to reinstating the boy-king before the Regent's supporters took over the country. Alarmed at this the British repeatedly requested the ministers to come back to their camp, but in vain.¹⁷⁰ Damodaran Pillai gained control of the capital frustrating the designs of Mappillai Thevar and restored order in the country. However, Ramanathapuram lost some territory in the Arantangi area which was occupied by the king of Thanjavur during the confused state of affairs. The king of Thanjavur claimed that the Nawab's attempted intervention in Ramanathapuram affairs amounted to violation of the agreement by which the king of Thanjavur desisted from claiming the said territory. As the Nawab had to deal with the Maravas of Tirunelveli, he did not pursue his designs of either the collection of tribute or the annexation of Ramanathapuram.

But Damodaran Pillai knew full well that it was but the beginning of the troubles that were in store for him and to meet the situation he entered into a treaty with the Dutch on the 4th January 1767. The Dutch agreed to give a share of the pearl fishery

¹⁶⁸ Damodaran Pillai to the Nawab and Council, MC January, 1764, Vol. 18, p. 70.

¹⁶⁹ MC 9th January 1764, Vol. 20-A, pp. 12-15.

¹⁷⁰ *Robert Palk in Council*, 22nd December 1764 M.C. Vol. 81, P.906

from the Madurai coast. The Dalavai transferred the possession of Pamban canal to the Dutch however, retaining for his people free access to the canal. The Dutch were given the power to permit or prohibit the entry of foreigners. In addition to this, the Dutch were given permission to repair their establishment at Kilakarai and were also shown some tax concessions.

The above treaty does not seem to have been observed by the Sethupathi. It appears from the Tirunelveli Collector's letter to the president of the committee of the assumed revenue dated 31st December 1790 that the Raja of Ramanathapuram compelled the Dutch to pay their annual tribute and enacted a custom on all their exports and imports. The Pamban Canal also seems to have been in possession of the Raja of Ramanathapuram as is shown by the Madurai Collector's letter to the Collector of Tirunelveli, dated 14th April 1792.

At this juncture, Raja Tuljaji renewed his conflict with Ramanathapuram on the question of the possession of Hanumanthagudi district. The first Anglo-Mysore war (AD 1767-69) enabled Damodaran Pillai to take the Hanumanthagudi fort to reconquer the entire Arantangi area and to annex it to Ramanathapuram.¹⁷¹ Tuljaji referred the issue to the Madras Council and the council gave him a blank cheque to clear the territory of its invaders.¹⁷² Meanwhile the Raja's relations with Pudukkottai and Sivaganga too became hostile. The Kallans of Pudukkottai intruded into Thanjavur every now and then and the Raja of Sivaganga captured a few elephants belonging to Tuljaji.¹⁷³ These minor incidents made Tuljaji enthrone at Ramanathapuram his candidate Mappilla Thevar a rival to the boy-king so that he could establish his sway over the Marava and

¹⁷¹ Translation of a *Personal Letter* from the Raja of Pudukkottai to Col. Wood Hyre 1183, Pudukkottai Samasthanam Records (A.D. 1770) Tuljaji, 15th July, 1771, *Letter to Madras Council*, MC, Vol. 19, pp. 187-190.

¹⁷² *Letter to Madras Council*, 8th March, 1771, MC Vol. 19, pp. 83-85.

¹⁷³ *Tuljaji's Letter to Madras Council*, 25th March 1771, MC Vol. 10, pp. 109-110.

Pudukkottai.¹⁷⁴ In February 1771, Tuljaji at the head of a large detachment of 4,000 horses and a number of sepoy marched against Ramanathapuram.¹⁷⁵ He won the favour of the Dutch on the eastern coast who became hostile and were eagerly looking forward to an opportunity for denying the right of the Sethupathi in pearl fishing, with an offer to grant them commercial rights and to cede the port of Tondi in Sivaganga.¹⁷⁶ But the Madras Government did not favour the aggressive policy of Thanjavur. Josias Du Pre (AD 1770-73). The Governor of Fort St George suggested restrain from hostilities pointing out to the Raja the impropriety of making himself the judge of the charges he himself made against the Marava.¹⁷⁷ But Tuljaji without paying any heed to this went ahead. Ramanathapuram on the other hand got the support of the ruler of Sivaganga by ceding Tirupathu and the services of a body of the Nawab's troops by granting Pallikodan.¹⁷⁸ With a view to winning the favour of the Nawab, the Sethupathi acknowledged the Wallajah overlordship over Ramanathapuram. Muhammad Ali promised his protection and asked the Sethupathi to stand firm¹⁷⁹ but did nothing perhaps because of his anxiety to see both the powers weakened by mutual rivalry for his taking advantage of the situation.¹⁸⁰

The Thanjavur forces in the disguise of Nawab's marching to the help of the Marava advanced close to the border post of Moodervattunatham and made a surprise attack on the 3rd February. After a clash in which each side lost about ninety men the Ramanathapuram troops withdraw to Armogam. Now Manoji, the General of Thanjavur himself decided to put a stop to his aggressive activities because of the possibility of wider estrangement by the young Raja over-rulling him. The invaders swept the posts of

¹⁷⁴ *Mohamed Itabar khan, 17th March 1771, Letter to Madras Council, MC Vol. 19, p. 118.*

¹⁷⁵ *Dalavai of Ramnad, undated Letter to Macdoom Ali Khan, MC Vol. 19, p. 65.*

¹⁷⁶ *Dalavai of Ramnad, 26th January 1771, Letter to Madras Council, MC Vol. 19, p. 30.*

¹⁷⁷ MC 1771, Vol. 19, p. 32.

¹⁷⁸ MC 1771, Vol. 19, Pp. 86-87.

¹⁷⁹ MC 1771, Vol. 19, Pp. 36-38.

¹⁸⁰ K. Rajayyan, *British Diplomacy in Tanjore*, Rao and Raghavan publication, Mysore, 1969, p. 56.

Sundarapandiapuram, Mangalgudi, Kannagudi, Kaduvalandam and Hanumanthagudi in succession¹⁸¹ and infested the strong post of Armogam, key to Ramanathapuram. Armogam fell on 19th February.¹⁸² On the next day, the forces Pradani Pitchai Pillai undaunted by the advance of the Thanjavur forces mobilized all forces and prepared to the defence of the capital.¹⁸³ Despite the fact that Tuljaji was in an advantageous position, he suggested terms for settlement. He asked the Rani to pay a visit to him with her son Sethupathi apologies for his resistance, to give her daughter in marriage to the son of Mappilla Thevar, to agree to the marriage with the sister of Mappilla Thevar, to cede the district of Armogam to his rival to the throne and to surrender half of her treasures together with two heavy guns and two large elephants to Thanjavur. Though the terms were humiliating, yet the queen consented to matrimonial alliance and even to the territorial clause and offered to part with two lakhs of rupees, one heavy gun and, one large elephant. But she firmly refused to pay a visit to the Raja as it amounted to an insult to her honour. But Tuljaji puffed up with pride refused to come to terms with her.¹⁸⁴ The forces of Thanjavur attacked the fort of Ramanathapuram and struck down a part of the wall to the extent of forty feet. The Marava 9000 strong on the other hand, repaired the trenches in the night and made repeated attacks. They also broke open the big tank of Ramanathapuram and flooded the camp of Thanjavur.¹⁸⁵ As both sides were exhausted, they renewed negotiations. On the 9th March, they arrived at a settlement by which the queen ceded most of the occupied territories, Hanumanthagudi to Thanjavur and Armogam to Mappilla Thevar. She also paid 1,30,000 rupees to the Raja and parted with two pieces of cannon and two elephants. The weakened Ramanathapuram was left in possession of only its southern district. On the other hand, Thanjavur acquired territories yielding annual revenue of three lakhs of Madurai Chakrams or rupees. This

¹⁸¹ MC 1771, Vol. 19, p. 76.

¹⁸² MC 1771, Vol. 19, Pp. 80-81.

¹⁸³ MC 1771, Vol. 19, p. 82.

¹⁸⁴ MC 1771, Vol. 19, Pp. 83-85.

¹⁸⁵ MC 1771, Vol. 19, p. 106.

was indeed a humiliating treaty and Ramanathapuram had to accept the defeat, though it managed to be independent by not accepting the levy of annual tributes. But in November 1771 Tuljaji had to return the lands and money taken from the queen on the orders of the Nawab.¹⁸⁶

The Nawab of Arcot could not tolerate the quarrels that went on among the rulers whom he thought were his tributaries. So he attacked Thanjavur and reduced the Raja to submission. Then he turned his attention to Ramanathapuram. The Sethupathi did not send any help to the Nawab in his wars with Thanjavur probably as a retaliatory measure. The Nawab repeatedly wrote to the Madras Council that the Sethupathi had occupied circar villages, harboured the most notorious robbers in their forests and that he had permitted the Dutch to establish factories without his consent. He further added that the Sethupathi did not pay any tribute and ascended the throne without his consent.¹⁸⁷

Without examining the merits of the case, the Madras Government actively supported the Nawab's policy and sent a force under Col. Joseph Smith. He was joined by the Tondaiman's forces also and the combined forces entered Ramanathapuram. On 28th May 1772 the forces took the queen by surprise and completely surrounded Ramanathapuram. Another army under Abraham Bonjour from Madurai advanced to the eastern borders of Sivaganga and captured Tiruppuvanam thereby preventing the troops of Sivaganga from coming to the rescue of the Sethupathi.¹⁸⁸ Umdat-Ul-Umara, the Nawab's son who exercised general control of the operations opened peaceful negotiations with the queen, but they proved futile. On 1st June, Smith ordered a general siege and the next day made a breach on the walls. On 2nd at 5 PM a corps of grenadiers led by Major John Braithwai to attack the 3,000 strong Marava garrison. Many died

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁷ MC 1771, Vol. 19, p. 247 and M.C. 1772, Vol.21, pp. 101-102.

¹⁸⁸ MC 1772, Vol. 42, p. 442.

fighting gallantly while the rest fled.¹⁸⁹ Ramanathapuram fell and the invaders plundered towns and imprisoned the queen with her son, now barely eleven years of age and her two daughters. The royal prisoners were taken to Tiruchirappalli.¹⁹⁰

The Ramanathapuram country then came under the direct management of the Nawab who leased it to a renter and it remained in the hands of the Nawab for about eight years till AD 1780. The Nawab renamed Ramanathapuram as Ali Nagar. The Nawab confiscated the lands¹⁹¹ of the peasants and handed them over to his favourites.¹⁹² Ever since the annexation of Ramanathapuram it experienced nothing but execution.¹⁹³

The Nawab's administrative acts of commission and omission such as dropping out of popular names, confiscation of the lands of the peasants and handing them over to his favourites earned the general animosity of the people.¹⁹⁴ Further the loyal adherents of the Sethupathi could not forget the arrest of their king and so they demanded the restoration of their chief. They threatened to capture Ramanathapuram and drive away the Nawab's army. They boldly plundered the Nawab's camp and company's troops and threw rockets into the forts held by the Nawab's forces as a result of which the Nawab's men took asylum in fortified places.¹⁹⁵

Mappilla Thevar, the uncle of the Sethupathi and a former claimant to the throne of Ramanathapuram wanted to avail himself of the opportunity. He had the backing of the people as they preferred any Marava ruler to that of a Muslim ruler. The rebels

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 479

¹⁹⁰ *Military Dispatch* to England, Vol. 7-9, 80-81 and MC 1771 Vol. 42-C 472. An inscription dated 17th day of Avani Nandana (29th August, 1772) speaks of the occupation of the country by the Nawab, Arais 1910-11, No.14 of App. of 1911, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ *Ramnad Book* for 1788, No. 203.

¹⁹² MC 1772, Vol.43, p. 1033.

¹⁹³ *Tinnevelly Book* for 1782 No. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Vide No. 51 above.

¹⁹⁵ MC 1772, Vol. 43, p. 1038

united under the leadership of Mappilla Tevar captured a considerable part of the country.

Meanwhile in Sivaganga Thandavaraya Pillai, the former Diwan sought the aid of Hyder Ali for the restoration of the state to the house of the former ruler. Hyder Ali promised help for the liberation for the Marava states.¹⁹⁶ But, as Thandavaraya Pillai died suddenly, this could not materialise. After the death of the *Pradani*, the Marudhu brothers who were with the queen became prominent. They took a lead in the affairs of the occupied territory. They had been waiting for the earliest opportunity to usurp power. That opportunity presented itself when the second Mysore war broke out in AD 1780. When Hyder Ali fell upon Arcot in AD 1780, the Marudhus with the help of a small force obtained from Syed Sahib, the General at Dindigul, desolated the Nawab's territories upto Madurai.¹⁹⁷ Upon the advance of the Marudhus to Sivaganga, the ill-disciplined forces of the Nawab stationed in walled towns offered no resistance. The queen, accompanied by the Marudhus entered Sivaganga and Vellachi, the daughter of Vaduganatha Thevar was proclaimed queen of Sivaganga and Marudhus became her ministers. The invasion of Hyder Ali prevented the Nawab from sending additional troops to Sivaganga.

The success of the Sivaganga's, rebellion gave a fresh fillip to the rebellion in Ramanathapuram. Mappilla Thevar with the assistance of Hyder Ali expelled the Nawab's troops from Ramanathapuram.¹⁹⁸ The people of Ramanathapuram preferred Mappilla Thevar to the Nawab. The Nawab having lost control over both Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga became panicky about the turn of events. Hyder Ali was growing in strength in the Carnatic and everything looked dismal for the English.

¹⁹⁶ MC 1772, Vol. 21, pp. 282-83.

¹⁹⁷ Vide No. 53 above.

¹⁹⁸ *Tinnevelly Book*, January 1782, No. 5.

Further, small chiefs of South India were induced to create disturbances against the Nawab.

Under the circumstances the Nawab had no alternative but to release the Sethupathi and reinstate him. The Nawab released the Sethupathi on 9th April 1781.¹⁹⁹ This had the desired effect and the chiefs were pacified. Mappilla Thevar thereupon joined Hyder Ali.²⁰⁰ The Sethupathi was asked to pay a tribute of Rs 1,75,000/- to the Nawab on the basis of his annual revenues being five lakhs of rupees.²⁰¹ In the beginning the Sethupathi showed a disposition to be faithful to the Nawab. But once he got control over his territory, he began to show his rebellious tendency. While this tendency was growing, he interfered in the affairs of Sivaganga country, forgetting that it was also another Marava state. He sought to fight with the Marudhus instead of forming an alliance with them against their common enemies, the Nawab and the English. The reason might be that the Marudhus did not belong to the royal house of Sivaganga. But he had to give up his attempt when in AD 1784 the company which administrated the Nawab's territories under the Assignment recognized both Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga.²⁰²

When Hyder Ali ransacked the southern territories, he had made one Kattu Raja, a Nayak prince as the ruler of Madurai.²⁰³ The Sethupathi thought that with the help of this prince he could regain his lost independence. But the Sethupathi could not give the lead as he was under the constant vigil of the Nawab. He could not even count on the support of the Dutch for in AD 1785 they had given effect to the treaty of friendship which they concluded with the English on 2nd September 1783.²⁰⁴ So he had to seek the help of the French.

¹⁹⁹ MC 1781, Vol. 74, p. 1076.

²⁰⁰ MC 1781, Vol. 875, p. 2129.

²⁰¹ Raja Ra Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

²⁰² MC 1793, Vol. 158, pp. 474-75.

²⁰³ MC 1781, Vol.73, p. 273.

²⁰⁴ Caldwell, *History of Tinnevelly*, Jetley, New Delhi, 1889, p. 83.

On the 10th May 1787, the Sethupathi's Diwan Sankara Narayana Pillai wrote to Governor General of the French-India asking for help for the independence of the states of Madurai and Ramanathapuram.²⁰⁵ This letter also states that the faithful Diwan left no stone unturned to free the country even when the king was a prisoner at Tiruchirappalli. Both Ramanathapuram and Madurai promised to give ports and lands and also to meet the expenses of the war in five year's time in case the French had helped them to be free from the Nawab. The French were also interested in such an alliance. But the outbreak of the Third Mysore war made this alliance impossible. Disappointed in this direction, the Sethupathi had to pretend to be in friendship with the Nawab and the English.

The refusal of Vellachi, the princess of Sivaganga to marry the Sethupathi made the latter sever his connections with Sivaganga and the Marudhus. He closed the road leading from Tirunelveli to Tondi as a result of which Sivaganga lost the custom duty collected at Parthivanur. In retaliation Chinna Marudhu diverted a stream flowing from his territory into Ramanathapuram. Now both the states were at loggerheads with each other.²⁰⁶ The conflict spread like wild fire when several poligars openly or clandestinely aided the one or the other. The Madras Government was helpless and it remained a silent spectator.²⁰⁷ With the result the war continued culminating in battles at Anandoor²⁰⁸, Vasianoor and Paramakudi.²⁰⁹ But neither side won any decisive victory. The forces of Ramanathapuram set fire to 150 villages in Sivaganga while the Marudhus carried off the inhabitants of Paramakudi.

At long last the Nawab and the company intervened. Landon, the Company's Collector of Poligar Pashkush directed both to stop the war. But the Sethupathi, who

²⁰⁵ *French translation of a Tamil letter* written by S.N. Pandia Pillai, Diwan of Ramnad to G.G. of French India, dated 9th May 1787.

²⁰⁶ *FD to England*, 1784, Vo. 3, pp. 332-33.

²⁰⁷ *Political Despatches to England*, 1794, Vol. 3, pp. 316-18.

²⁰⁸ MC 1794, Vo. 186, p. 263.

²⁰⁹ MC 1764, Vol. 187, p. 2757.

developed an independent spirit, did not pay any heed to it. Thereupon, the Nawab warned the Sethupathi that his conduct would land him in lasting ruin.²¹⁰ So the Sethupathi had to withdraw from further participation in the war.²¹¹ George Powney, the successor of Landon directed the Sethupathi to meet him in person and to explain his conduct. But the latter refused.²¹² This enraged the company. Further when a famine visited the southern provinces, the Madras Council directed the Sethupathi to permit the free import of grains to his territory, but he continued the collection of duties.²¹³ But this also fell on deaf ears as the Sethupathi was tending to assume an independent status.²¹⁴

At the commencement of the Sethupathi's reign, the government was in the hands of Muthupillai, Velupillai and Sankarapillai who were his *pradhanis*. These were succeeded by the famous revenue reformer Muthirulappa Pillai. Unlike his predecessors he firmly believed that the best way of improving the country was by internal reforms and by hearty cooperation with the English who were becoming the virtual masters of the Carnatic. He organized the revenue and account system of the country on sound lines. He built several chatrams along the main roads of the pilgrimage. He opened roads through forests. He spent a large sum of money on the restoration of the Pagodas or temples which were in ruins. It was only he who completed the splendid Chockattan Mandapams.²¹⁵

In AD 1790, the Madras Government finding it difficult to induce the Nawab to pay his share of the company's expenses which the latter incurred with regard to the administration of military operations in called Nawab's territory, assumed by proclamation the management of the Nawab's territory and established the Board of

²¹⁰ MC 1794, Vol. 45, p. 198.

²¹¹ MC 1794, Vol. 187, p. 2992.

²¹² MC 1794, Vol. 44, p. 327.

²¹³ MC 1794, vol. 45, p. 28.

²¹⁴ *Political Despatches to England 1795*, Vol. 2, p. 43.

²¹⁵ Raja Ram Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

Assigned Revenues to administer the revenues. In September, 1790 Maclead was appointed to supervise the collection of revenues in the Madurai country for the first time. In March 1791 he enhanced the Ramanathapuram peshcush to Rs 2,20,000. The Sethupathi appeared to be quite satisfied with the arrangement and asked for and obtained permission for the current year. In AD 1792, Ramanathapuram country was ceded by treaty to the British Government who sent Col. Martins with a force to occupy the country to maintain order and levy the annual tribute from the Sethupathi. Martins occupied a bungalow in the heart of the town on the bank of Mugavai *Urani*. It is said that Muthirulappa Pillai became haughty and headstrong, as a result of his intimacy with the Colonel. Therefore, the Sethupathi thought it prudent to dismiss Muthirulappa Pillai and appoint Muthu Kumarappa Pillai in his place. Muthirulappa Pillai, however appears to have gone and resided at Madurai as the renter of British revenue.²¹⁶

At a time when the Sethupathi was gradually trying to overthrow the overlordship of the Nawab, Mangaleswari Nachiyar who claimed to be the sister of the Sethupathi rose in revolt against him and pleaded for the intervention of the Madras Council. In her memorial to the Madras Council sent on 27th August 1794 she asserted that the Sethupathi injured the inhabitants and impoverished the country and brought indelible shame to his family by his distraction. This memorial seems to exaggerate the wickedness of the Sethupathi to further her own objectives. Probably the Nawab induced her to plead thus before the Madras Council so that the British could take prompt action against the Sethupathi. Anyhow Major Stevenson was sent against the Sethupathi in AD 1795 to capture Ramanathapuram. The Sethupathi never anticipated this and so he surrendered the fort on the 8th March without any resistance. The Sethupathi was deposed on the ground that he oppressed the people, continued his hostilities with Sivaganga despite the instruction of the Madras Council to desist, disobeyed orders to

²¹⁶ Vide No. 80 above.

attend the Collector, neglected to pay and part of the current peshkush and that he violated the instructions contained in the *sunnud* granted to him in AD 1781 by the Nawab.²¹⁷ The Sethupathi was then sent to Tiruchirappalli and the Company's rule was established in the country. The Madras Council granted an allowance of Rs. 1,000 per month for the support of the Sethupathi and issued a proclamation promising security to the people.²¹⁸

With a view to consolidating their position the Madras Council handed over the administration of Ramanathapuram to Powney, the then Collector of Poligar Peshkush and introduced certain reforms to pacify the subjects. The Collector abolished the customs collection as it hampered the progress of trade. The new administration introduced agricultural reforms and villages settlements.²¹⁹

In the meantime, the Company after a protracted enquiry decided the succession in favour of Mangaleswari Nachiar stating at the same time that she would be restored after normalcy returned to Ramanathapuram.²²⁰ These remedial measures did not pacify the people for they wanted to avenge the defeat of their beloved Sethupathi and reinstate him. On 23rd April 1797 a few poligars who were under the Sethupathi joined together and they raised their voice of protest under the leadership of Kattabomman, the Poligar of Panjalankurichi.²²¹ But it was nipped in the bud.

The Marava without losing hope again revolted in AD 1799 when Lusington was the Collector. On 24th April 1799 Mylappan with the help of bundle of Marava troops attached the taluk cutchery of Abiramam and looted it. He did not spare the taluk

²¹⁷ MC 1795, Vol. 62-B, pp. 1278-80.

²¹⁸ *Political Despatches to England 1795*, Vol. 2, pp. 351-52 and S. Radhakrishna Iyer, *The History of Pudukottai State*, p. 297, **RC** 1795 Vol. 66-A, pp. 32-48.

²¹⁹ Revenue Consultation 1798, Vol. 91, p. 4229 and RD to England 1795, Vol. 5, p. 1237.

²²⁰ Revenue Consultation 1795, Vol. 64, pp. 2541-2555.

²²¹ Revenue Consultation 1798, Vol.89, pp. 3369-70.

Cutcherries of Mudukulathur and Kamudi. But this revolt also was put down,²²² after this the Sethupathi was transferred from Tiruchirappalli to Madras so that he might not be a nuisance to the Company in future. He died there in AD 1801.

It is indeed remarkable that the Ramanathapuram Kingdom was the first to come under the direct management of the British. Though it was restored to Mangaleswari Nachiar on 20th February 1803, it never regained its former position as it was reduced to the status of Zamindar.²²³

The reign of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi though full of troubles and turmoils was remarkable for a plethora of public works undertaken. For the first time, he built a big chatram at Devipattinam and endowed it with the three villages of Thenpuduvaikud, Athanakottai and Puduvaikudi. He built another at Attangari and endowed it with the Nagarikathan village. Again it was only owing to his munificence that the Ramalingawami Madam was constructed. Further, he constructed chatrams at Naganath Samudram, Kadugusandai, Muthu Ramalingapuram, Pallimadam, Sikkal and Kottaipattinam. Besides these he also made large endowments to many private chatrams. He endowed the Kumara Pillai's Chatram at Rameshwaram built by Muthu Kumara, a former minister of the state with extensive lands in Kattavilagam and the Sentheni villages. In the year AD 1770, he made similar endowments to Alanganur Chatram built by one Pichai Pillai, a former minister of the Samasthanam. He also richly endowed the Velayudapuram Chatram at Paramakkudi, the Theerthandathanam Chatram, the Purshottama Chatram at Tiruppulani and Thangachimadam. He renovated the temples at Rameshwaram, Tiruchuli, Kamudhi and other places. He granted nearly 30 villages to Brahmin priests in the temples. It was only he who arranged for 'Utchikkala Kattalai' (noon Puja) at Madurai temple.

²²² *Revenue Consultation 1799*, Vol. 96, p. 2770.

²²³ *Revenue Despatches to England*, Vol. 7, pp. 528-540.

Christianity did not make much attraction during his time. The Sethupathi persecuted the Christians probably because of his suspicion, that they identified themselves with the British. They were robbed of their property and were subjected too much ignominy. That is why one can find that Christianity did not make much headway despite the efforts of such eminent men Schwartz, Jaenicks and Glarcke. But it was during this time that Schwartz opened the first provincial school. The school became popular that even the Sethupathi and his minister sent their children to this school.²²⁴

Summary

In the history of the Sethupathies from the early times down to the abolition of Zamindari system all over India, like the Nayaks of Madurai, they governed Ramanathapuram in a great modern administrative setup. Especially the present town of Ramanathapuram is mostly what the Sethupathies made it. They maintained peace and order in Ramanathapuram when the country was in a most chaotic condition in South Indian History. Their rule filled up the void between the Nayak rule at Madurai and the establishment of British supremacy in the land.

The endowments lands for the temples were given to the various villages and were administered with utmost care. The Sethupathi rulers were the protectors of Hinduism, civilization and culture of Ramanathapuram. They protected the land from the foreign invaders who wanted to establish their religion.

²²⁴ R. Caldwell, *op.cit*, p. 19. Cf. Raja Ram Rao, *op. cit*, p. 128.