Chapter 3

Power and Control of Land in Ramnad Zamindari

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

1. **Pre-Zamindari Settlement and Social Stratification**

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

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¹ Tolkappiyar, *Tolkapiyam, Porulathikaram*, 5, 11.
² The *kurinchi* land was fully covered by mountains, people engaged with hunting as their natural occupation and they called as *kanavar, vettuvar* and *panavar*. In *mullai* land people's major occupation was cattle riding. The *marutham* land was the fertile and cultivable land. They engaged in agriculturalist, therefore they called as *ulavar*. Tamil literature, *Perumbanatirapadai* indicate the coastal region people who involved in fishing and selling fish called as *parathavar*. Ramasamy Sastri, *The Tamils, People, their History and Culture* Vol 3, 24.
Brahmin, served as commander-in-chief under Thirmalai Nayak’s army. According to T. Raja Ram Rao, Vellalans considered themselves equal to Brahmans; therefore they were eager to practice the rituals and customs of Brahmans like wearing thread and giving up taking meat and liquor. The Vellalan community people were mostly landowning; some of them served as karnam especially Sembunattu Vellalans served as village accountants and some of the Vellalans were involved in trade. The Maravans, belonged to the warrior castes and got land grants for their military services in the classical age. The Ramnad Setupathi belonged to the Maravan caste and granted land to warriors who were mostly Maravans and Kallans. Apart from soldiers of these two castes, Agambadians served in fortresses and public offices and received remuneration for their service. They were called Sevaikaran, which term later came to be called Servaikaran. They were landholders in lieu of their military and guard services. Ordinary soldiers got land grants capable of producing five

5 Lalitha, Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai, 232.
6 Vellalans had six sub divisions like Pandi Vellalans (found mostly Ramnad and Pallimadam Taluk), Arumbukkattu Vellalans (part of Rajasingamangalam Taluk), Kodickal Vellalans (entire Ramnad), Sembunattu Vellalans (Ramnad, Kamudi, Muthukulathur and Rajasingamangalam), Kurumbu Vellalans (part of Hanumantagudi Taluk) and Malaikatti Vellalans (part of Hanumantagudi Taluk). Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 29. There were different views about of the sub caste and sub division of Vellalans. Vellalan community people had title like pillai and muthali (first place) in Ramnad.
7 Kurnam means village accountant
9 Ram Rao described the maravan means ‘maraven’ or ‘i will never forget’. Ramnad Manual noticed that Maravans were the inhabitants of the Ramnad and found large number in seventeenth century. They were found mostly in Ramnad, Muthukulathur and some part of Kamudi. They were changed their violent and turbulent nature into cultivations during the period of nineteenth century. Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 30-31; Nelson says that ‘Maravans were the most powerful caste during the Pandyanadu or Pandyanamandalam’. Nelson, The Madura Country: A Manual, 38. According to S. Kadhirvel, Maravars were migrated from Ramnad to Tirunelveli, but their date of migration was controversial. The Uthumalai palayam records show that they were migrated from Ramnad to Uthumalai in Tirunelveli district which occurred in the eleventh century A.D. And another record of Vadagarai palayam records says that they moved from Ramnad to Vadagarai in Tirunelveli district in 12th century A.D. But Singampatti, Urkad and Seithur Maravans migrated earlier than Uthumalai and Vadagarai palayam. They were migrated to Tirunelveli region in the different period. Kadhirvel, A History of the Maravas, 8.
10 According to Edgar Thurston, Kattu Tottiyan castes of Tirunelveli called as Mandai Periadanakkaran or Servaikaran. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of Southern India Vol. VII, 184.
kalams\(^{12}\) a year. The soldier’s land grant yielded seven kalams. The chief of the one hundred soldiers got jeevitham (military service grant) land which could to produce fifty kalams. The state collected taxes of five fanams\(^{13}\) from these granted lands.\(^{14}\) Maravans of Ramnad mostly served as soldiers in the Zamin’s military force and the rest of the Maravans worked in the Zamindar’s palace and public offices. Some of them were involved in cultivating the field and they paid tribute called ‘varisai varam’ to the Zamindar, who made it compulsory with no exception for drought or bad seasons. According to Ramnad Manual Maravans had seven subdivisions\(^{15}\) and they were superior to Shanans, Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. Maravan rulers of Ramnad were the protector or Tharmakartha of temples such as Rameswaram, Uthirakosamangai and they were the guardians of the temples of Ramnad Kingdom.

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


\(^{13}\) Fanam means a silver coin, 12\(\frac{3}{4}\) fanam equal to one rupee. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 155.


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

17 Pillay, Tamilaka Varalaru: Makkalum Panbadum, 332; Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 35.
18 Rajus community people initially settled at Keelarajakularaman (located 20 km towards the east of Rajapalayam) and later they permanently shifted and settled new place west of Keelarajakularaman later it was known as Rajapalayam
19 Lalitha, Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai, 154-159.
20 Ramnad Manual listing out the weaving communities of Ramnad such as Pattunulkarars, Sedars, Kaikollar, Saliars and Saluppar. Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 37.
21 The Senguntar or red dagger which indicates they might be warrior castes previously
22 Ramasamy, Historical Dictionary of the Tamils, Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Culture, No. 6, 104.
2. Permanent settlement and social structure

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

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23 Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector dated on 05.02.1882, 7.
24 Rajayyan, Tamilnadu: A Real History, 340.
3. Land rights and new social division

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

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

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

4. The Power and Influence of Zamindars

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

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\(^{30}\) The traditional right of land ownership was concern as ‘those who cleared the bushes or cultivate the crops, or paid tax they were the owner of the land’. King or ruler could not involve their right or could not oppose their right over the land. If ruler wanted the land means had to buy the land through paying price for that.

\(^{31}\) Srinivasa Ragavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 218, 222.

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

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

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33 Antastu is a Sanskrit word which derived from antahstha means being in the mid or between. Price, Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India, 135.
35 Price, Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India, 135-144.
food, *prasadam* and coconut. According to *Ramnad Manual*, the Raja of Ramnad’s power and prestige could be assessed by the court practices and etiquette during the eighteenth century. The Tondaiman Raja of Pudukkottai, Raja of Sivaganga and the Chief of Tanjore territory must stand before him, with palms of their hands joined together and stretched out towards the presence of Raja of Ramnad. The Poligar of Panjalankurichi Kattabommu and the Tottians were considered as inferior to the Raja of Ramnad and they should prostrate themselves in full length before the Setupathi and after rising must stand not be seated until Raja of Ramnad seated.

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

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36 Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 151.
to donate the land and money for patronising poets, establishing schools and other such charitable activities. He donated forty thousand rupees towards constructing a hostel for Madras Christian College, Thambaram where he had studied. He also donated money for constructing *chatrams* in and around the Rameswaram temple for the visit of pilgrims and opened schools for marginalised students. The zamindars of Ramnad were mostly concentrated to maintain their status as rulers of *vis-a-vis* their reduced political status and limited authority.³⁹

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

³⁹ Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 134.
crazy about the purchase of hunting and high bred dogs. These hunting trips were organised to facilitate the good will of the British officials. The knowledge of guns and the possession of hunting dogs were efforts to show off their status to the British officials in a scenario where such technological know-how and scientific knowledge were markers of status and superiority.

5. Zaminars, Karnams and Mirasidars in the Agrarian Structure

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

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

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

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

44 Proceedings of Board of Revenue, 2nd December 1864, No. 7843.
karnam’s service and duties were not satisfactory to the British Government. Their land assessment and fixing the rate was not proper; ultimately cultivators suffered to pay the land rent. Sometimes, Zamindars delayed and denied to issue pattas to ryots and collected land rent from ryots from unsettled lands also. The illiterate ryots were not aware of the procedures for receiving the pattas and officials’ assessment of the land rent. The manipulation and mismanagement of the Zamindars were the major causes for the critical situation of the ryots in the Ramnad Zamindari.

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

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48 Varghese Jeyaraj, Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai, 147.
49 Papers on Mirasi Rights (Madras: Athenaeum Press, 1862)
50 According to H.H.Wilson Payacarry, a temporary cultivator, one who cultivates the land of another for a stipulated term and a given share of the crop. Wilson, A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms,413.
51 Saratha Raju, Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850, 31-34.
payment of cash of Rs two and half to four was also practised in the mirasi tenure.\textsuperscript{52} The agricultural labourers mostly belonged to the lowest class of people or economically backward people such as Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans.

6. Problems and Issues of Peasants

6.1. Litigation and Administrative Issues

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

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

\textsuperscript{52} Proceedings of Board of Revenue, dated on 11.11.1872, No. 2179.
\textsuperscript{53} Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 346.
\textsuperscript{54} In1804 Mangaleswari Nachiyar adopted Annasami as heir
regent for ruler. However, Sivagami Nachiyar, daughter of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I, filed a suit against Annasami Tevar and claimed herself as the Zamindarini of Ramnad. Therefore Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Setupathi @ Annasami Tevar had to spend expensively on litigations from 1807-1820. The lower courts decided in her favour in 1815 and she was enjoying the Zamindari for one full year. However she failed to pay the revenue and the peshcush fell into arrears. Therefore the estate was placed under the management of the Court of Sadr Adalat for a period of fourteen years as her behalf.  

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{57} Adoptive mother of Ramasami Setupathi
\textsuperscript{58} Adoptive mother of Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-1873)
\textsuperscript{59} Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 484.
\textsuperscript{60} Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 49.
administration, irrigation or cultivation. The British government and officials gave more attention to get more income from land. The heavy debt and mismanagement of the estate managers before the 1860s crumpled the economy of the estate and therefore Zamindars demanded more rent to increase the revenue. Nelson’s views about the status of Ramnad country in 1868 is that “At the present moment Ramnad appears to be in a semi-ruinous state. The tanks are breached, there are no roads worthy of the name in any part of it, cultivation is steadily decreasing the zamindari is heavily in arrears.”

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

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

62 Lee Warner in charge of the estate for the five years from March 1873 to 1878 and in charge of this estate for two and half years till August 1880.
63 Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 497.
64 This grant amount was made through the mortgage bond was executed by H.W. Bliss, Assistant Collector of Madura and agent of Court of Wards and Edward Turner, Manager of the Court of Wards.
government. Along with this amount, the annual *peshcush* Rs 2,55,000 for 1879 increased the loan amount. At the end of the nineteenth century the Zamindari of Ramnad had to repay Rs 16,77,830 to the British Government.\(^{65}\)

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

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

\(^{65}\) Letter from E.Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, dated 12.10.1887,5; Ram Row, *Ramnad Manual*, 349-350.

\(^{66}\) Ramasamy, *TamilNadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram*, 103-105.


\(^{68}\) *Ramanathapuram Samasthanam Records*, National Archives Branch, Lawspet, Puducherry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Amount of Arrears</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs          A   P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1869 to 1875</td>
<td>69,972-8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>39,143-5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>40,027-13-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>48,624-2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>59,094-7-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>2,41,467-5-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The above statistical data shows that Ramnad Zamindars maintained their arrears of annual *peshcush*, and could not look forward to improving irrigation sources and rectifying the arrears. The British government and officials gave more attention to get more income from land. In the second half of the nineteenth century the arrear amount increased. From 1881 to 1887 the total arrears of the tribute was Rs 25,84,892 which was cleared in 1888.69

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

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70 *J.H. Nelson’s Letter to Secretary to the Madras Government* dated on 13th June 1871, No. 1043.
6.2. Burden and Punishment on Peasants

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

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

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produce of his field. The ryot could not dig tank or well within fifty yards from the *Circar* channel or river or tank and thirty yards from the Zamindar’s tanks.\(^22\)

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

Ramnad Zamindari’s ryots were illiterate and could not understand the rate of the rent on the agreements. So they were cheated by *karnams* and government officials.\(^76\) Ryots had rights to appeal their trouble regarding the rate of assessment to


\(^{73}\) Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, dated 12.10.1887.p.18

\(^{74}\) *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee* Part I, p.112


\(^{76}\) Srinivasa Ragavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration*, 329.
district courts, but practically they hesitated and were denied, owing to wealth and influence. If they persisted, the result would not be favourable to them.

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

78 Estate Land Act Committee Landholders’ Statements, Part I, 346.
79 Report of the Commissioners for the investigation of alleged cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency, 1865.
The south-west monsoon and north-east monsoon were irregular too. The river Vaigai was the main source irrigation for the estate but generally it almost went dry.\textsuperscript{80} The following table informs us of the tanks and cultivable and waste lands of Ramnad Estate.

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


\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{talukwise_cultivatable_land_and_waste_land_in_ramnad_zamindari.png}
\caption{Talukwise Cultivatable land and Waste land in Ramnad Zamindari}
\end{figure}

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

\textsuperscript{80} Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 78.

water in tanks.\textsuperscript{82} The nanjai crop of paddy cultivation on punjai or uncultivated land also was considered for tax. The nanjai land tenant had to pay rent to Zamindar whether he cultivated or not.\textsuperscript{83}

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

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

\begin{footnotes}
\footnottelow{82}{Letter from Raja Ram Rao to Madura Collector, dated 05.02.1882 No. 24.}
\footnottelow{83}{Ram Row, \textit{Rammad Manual}, 292, 300.}
\footnottelow{84}{Ramasamy, \textit{Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers Ramanathapuram}, 509.}
\footnottelow{85}{M.B. Nanavati and J.J. Anjaria, \textit{The Indian Rural Problem} (Bombay: Indian society of Agricultural Economics, 1944), 15.}
\footnottelow{86}{Ram Row, \textit{Rammad Manual}, 77.}
\end{footnotes}
case of the payment as grain, one and half measurers of paddy or kambu or varagu or samai or kudiraivaly were given for the work of weeding or transplanting. Landlords fixed the grain payment to cultivators for the work of reaping and thrashing, one kalam of seed land (1 acre and 18 1/8 cents) and thirty to sixty measures of grains to the labourers. The value of the grains might be Rs 1-4-0 to Rs 2-8-0 per measure. In the case of punjai land the payment was compensated with grains, one and half to two measure of ragi, or two to two and a half of measures of varagu or cholam to the cultivator.  

6.3. Conditions of Agricultural Labour

The Company records note that serfs or slaves existed during Muslim rule. The Muslims had practice of selling the slaves to their masters. After the onset of the Company rule too slaves continued with their masters; some of them joined military force as soldiers. The practice of slavery disappeared in second half of nineteenth century.  

Dharma Kumar’s work differentiates the pannayal and adimai in agricultural labour. He states that adimai or slave was transferable from land to land, but in the case of pannayal, they were attached to the land permanently. In Madura country slavery gradually disappeared in 1819 and after the establishment of the British rule pallans and paraiyans was released from slavery and they entered the British military force. Some of them cultivated their own lands. The census of 1841 shows that, pallans’ and paraiyans’ population of Madura District was sixteen percent of the total population. The palli, pallans and paraiyans were the

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87 Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, dated on 12.10.1887, 18.
88 Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 25.11.1819.
89 Kumar, Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century, 41,44,52.
agricultural slaves. According to Mr. Ellis pallis were slaves or serf to Brahmins, the rest of the two castes were slaves of non-Brahmin high castes especially Vellalans landlords. The mirasidars had more slaves or pannayal, mostly pallans. They were forced to do work in irrigation sources and repairing work with a meagre rate of wages. Nevertheless, there are no sources to prove that slavery existed in southern India. Landowning people or elite groups saw to it that ryots never became landholders or landowners and that they were always maintained as landless labourers for securing their own social supremacy. The ryots were wandering from farm to farm and district to district for getting occupation and struggled for survival. The imbalance between elite groups and cultivators led to the collapse of the entire estate. There was no specific form slavery in southern Tamil country in the nineteenth century but the pannayals and padiyals of landlords were treated like slaves or serf. The Company brought about Act of Abolition of Slavery in 1843 abolished slavery legally in India; but the agricultural labourers were treated and maintained as serfs to Zamindars or Mirasidars or whoever was dominant in the social order.

7. Land Regulations and Defects of Agrarian Order

7.1. Need for Legislation

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

90 Papers on Mirasi Right, 334-335.
91 Kumar, Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century, 58-59.
92 Ludden, Peasant History in South India, 143-144.
93 Chakravarthi, Land Law in Madras Presidency, 31.
according to their wish and need. Initially there was no fixation of land tax by the Company. The Zamindar gradually increased the land tax year by year without consulting the Company. As a consequence, for resolving the problems of ryots, the Company formed the Provincial Council to monitor the land revenue collection of Zamindars. But gradually the Provincial Council failed to do its main duties. It became pro-Zamindar and it did not scrutinise the Zamindar’s methods of revenue collection. After the Provincial Council’s poor response, the Board of Directors decided to appoint a special commission known as ‘Circuit Committee’.94 This committee also failed to achieve much in the issue of revenue collection. This committee ignored the relationship between Zamindar and peasants. Finally, the Court of Directors abolished the Provincial Council and the Circuit Committee and appointed Collectors to control the Zamindari areas and a Board of Revenue was formed for supervising all the Collectors.95 This circumstance created the need to initiate land regulation to regulate the Zamindars and their officers related to revenue collection.

### 7.2. Regulations of 1802

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

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

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

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97 Srinivasa Ragavaiyangar, Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of British Administration, 227-231.
sell the land or transfer the tenancy rights to another ryot. (Regulation 28 of 1802 section 34 clauses 7) Section XIV of regulation of 1802 was more favourable to ryots. It said that landholders or Zamindars were responsible to grant patta to ryot with the right over the land and rent payable to Zamindar.98

The revenue administration of the Zamindari was supervised by a diwan or manager. He had assistants like karnams, nattanmakarans and kavalkars99 in all the villages to collect land revenue from each village.100 According the regulation of Zamindari settlement, landholder or Zamindars were required to issue pattas to ryots and receive agreements duly accepted by ryots called muchilikkas. The karnam prepared pattas which comprise the description of the property, terms of holding, payable rent and duration of the tenures. It entered in the tax register called variyedu (tax book). These pattas and muchilikkas must be registered by the karnams who were known as pattadars. The nattanmakarans was responsible to settle the collected amount to Zamindars treasury and mention the thandals (receipts) date and amount collected from pattadars. Nattanmakarans prepared acknowledgement receipt and handed over one copy to pattadars and the other copy to the Zamin’s office.101

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

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98 Chakravarthi, Land Law in Madras Presidency, 63.
99 Karnam, nattanmakarans and kavalkar received land grand as remuneration for their services.
100 Estate Land Act Committee Landholders’ Statements, Part III, 373-374.
101 Chakravarthi, Land Law in Madras Presidency, 65.
solve the disputes between the Mirasidars and the ryots. Hodgson states about the regulation of Zamindari settlement that “the first principle of the permanent settlement was to confirm and secure these rights” and that “the proprietary right of the Zamindars was no more than the right to collect from the cultivators that rent which custom has established as the right of Government...”.

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

### 7.3. Rent Regulation of 1822

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

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103 *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, 2nd December 1864, No.7843
from the tenant as renewable every year.\textsuperscript{106} In the first half of the nineteenth century the Board of Revenue legalised the rights of ryots, but the suppression of ryot by Zamindars was unavoidable. So the Government protected the ryots legally; but practically they were not fully secure by this legislation. Ryots had the right to appeal for his privileges to the district court but ultimately it was in vain.

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

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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} \textit{Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1864, No.7843}
\item \textsuperscript{107} \textit{Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part I, 223-224.}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Chakravarthi, \textit{Land Law in Madras Presidency}, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ram Row, \textit{Rammad Manual}, 466.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
recovery act failed which affected the regular revenue of the British government; therefore the Board passed the Madras Estate Land Act of 1908.

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

8. Defects of Regulations and Revenue Suits

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

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112 Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 279.
113 Varghese Jeyaraj, Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu: Madurai,151-152.
verbally; but practically they suffered and were oppressed by the Zamindars, officers, landlords and money lending communities. Some of the ryots sued against the illegal activities of landholders and Zamindars. The several law suits of Zamindars or against zamindars were filed in the civil and revenue courts of the district.\textsuperscript{115} The Madras Estate Land Act Committee Report states that debt and royal suits were the major issues and causes for the collapse of the administration of the Ramnad Zamindari.\textsuperscript{116} Between 1813 and 1829 Sivagami Nachiyar, daughter of Muthuramalinga Setupathi I (1763-72 & 1782-95) filed a case against Mangaleswari Nachiyar. From 1807 to 1873 a series of cases was filed against the Ramnad Zamindars. In 1873 when Ramnad was under the control of the Court of Wards, 3,848 cases were filed against the Zamindars.\textsuperscript{117} The following table shows how many suits were filed in Ramnad Zamindari during the period of 1879 and 1886 against the Zamindar for occupying several villages after the implementation of the Rent Recovery Act of 1865.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of suit against Ramnad Zamindars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: \textit{Letter from E.Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards,} 12.10.1887, 5.

\textsuperscript{115} Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 352.  
\textsuperscript{117} Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 49; Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 346, 497.
The above source shows that there was serious opposition against the occupancy of villages’ in Ramnad Zamindari. The ryots could not get benefit from the regulations and Acts and peasants were suppressed, controlled by Zamindars and landlords.

Several suits were filed by Nattukottai Chetties or money-lending community of Ramnad for large sums of money borrowed and due by the Zamindars of Ramnad. The Zamindar’s heavy debts and Setupathi (Baskarasami Setupathi) being a minor led to the Court of Wards taking charge of Ramnad. After the Court of Wards took over the Ramnad, gradually the total number of cases came to 266 by 1888. It indicates that the British followed liberal actions and granted remuneration to the peasants for continuing the cultivation processes for their proper and regular revenue from the land. The following charts describes about the suit filed in civil, magisterial and revenue courts for and against Ramnad Zamindar.

Source: Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, 12.10.1887, 5.

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118 Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 497.
9. The Famine of 1876-78 and its Impact

The failure of monsoon led to poor wet land cultivation in the entire Zamindari and ryots became debtors. Fertile lands were under the hands of Zamindars or their relatives who used tank and river water for cultivation. Zamindars and their relations were unwilling to repair the irrigation resources and demanded the tenants to do it. The Royal kin, manager of the estate and elite groups of the estate were the full beneficiaries of royal donations in the nineteenth century in Ramnad Zamin.\textsuperscript{119} Ryots’ condition was generally not easy to cultivate the land that mostly depended on sahukars or money lenders for the payment of their land rent. They repaid the loan partly by field production and partly from their earnings by labour. River Vaigai was the main source of irrigation.\textsuperscript{120} There were no perennial rivers in the Ramnad Zamindari and there was no shutter to sluices in tank and some of the ‘kalingal’\textsuperscript{121} were badly damaged which could not be maintained or repaired by Zamindars. They tried rarely to renovate some of the larger tanks but they did not bother about the smaller tanks.\textsuperscript{122}

Between 1813 and 1889, flood water of Vaigai river damaged the weak tanks of Ramnad Zamindari. As a result failure of crops, diseases and artificial starvation occurred during 1876 to 1878 which was called the Great Famine in the entire India. Ambalagar of the Karuttanyandel village of Ramnad Zamindari complained against the Zamindar that ‘no one has cultivated wet land for ten years’.\textsuperscript{123} The Great Famine of 1876-78 occurred and affected seriously the districts of Ganjam, Vizakapatnam,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Mosse, The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India, 84.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Kalingal means a stone facing or embankment for keeping the water of a reservoir. Wilson, A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms, 581.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee Part II, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Mosse, The Rule of Water, Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India, 99-101.
\end{itemize}
Godavari, Madura, Ramnad, Tinnevelly Tanjore, Malabar and South Canara and covered 74,000 square miles and affected 30 million people of Madras Presidency. Followed by the Great Famine series of floods occurred in 1877, 1880, 1882, 1883 and 1884. It was a complete blow on agriculture production and peasants’ routine life. Between 1750 and 1850 around 1,800,000 lost their lives. Again between 1875 and 1900 18 famines occurred in the Madras Presidency.\textsuperscript{124}

The British government’s economic policy towards agrarian order led to artificial famine and shortage of food grains. The commercialisation of agriculture was more beneficial to the Britain government. On the other hand, the inhabitants or indigenous ryots struggled for their lives. The decay or decline of the local industry was the major cause for the peasant’s ill nature of life. The people of the village community had the local chieftain or Zamindars utilise and exploit them for their luxurious lifestyle. During the period of failure of monsoon and famine, ryots were exempted from paying tribute after verification. But the ryot had to pay rent as arrear with the next year payment. It was clear that the government and the Zamindars were lent on collecting the tax from the peasant. The commercialisation of agriculture, mismanagement of the Zamindars and their heavy debt, lack of maintenance of irrigation sources, malpractice of village officers and tax burden were the major causes for famine or drought of 1876-1878. It paved the way for migration of the people to neighbouring places and other countries.\textsuperscript{125} In 1909, the report of the Ceylon Labour Commission stated that the total number of Tamils’ migration into

\textsuperscript{124} Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 77; Kumar, Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century, 41,44,52.

their country, was almost 42,000 Paraiyans, 29,000 Pallans, 18,000 Ambalagarans, 16,000 Kallans, 14,000 Vellalans, 10,000 Agambadians and 5 Brahmins also.126

10. Condition of Ryots under the Management of the Court of Wards

In 1803, with the introduction of permanent settlement in Ramnad, whenever the Zamindari was in a position of insecurity of financial shortage of revenue arrears, the Company formed the Court of Wards to protect the estate on behalf of the Company. In this sense, Ramnad Zamindari was under the management of Court of Wards during 1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889.127 The Ramnad Manual indicates that under the management of Raja of Ramnad, ryots had suffered and faced great difficulties, but, at the same time, under the control of Court of Wards ryots’ difficulties and problems were resolved and importance was given to renovate the irrigation sources. The Court of Wards made easy access to government officers for approval to harvest the crops and stopped the malpractice of officers and revenue assessment and accounts were properly maintained.

The period between 1823 and 1882 Ramnad Zamindar’s managers did not undertake proper maintenance of irrigation sources. In 1823, when Ramnad came under Court of Wards, manager Narayana Rao took necessary action to improve and renovate all the tanks of Ramnad Zamindari. After the takeover of Ramnad by under Court of Wards in 1873, with proper and strict administration, litigation suits gradually reduced. The Court of Wards main intension was to improve the agricultural sources to get more revenue from land. After the famine in the estate in 1876-78, the government gave importance to promote agricultural sources and was eager to spend more for improving irrigation work. In the period from 1873 to 1887

127 Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 121.
the government spent Rs.7,36,107 for irrigation for wet land. As a result they received from land as revenue Rs. 46,20,162.128

During the period of 1882 -1883 Ramnad had sufficient rain falls, and due to that agricultural production increased.129 Last two decades of the nineteenth century Ramnad had good monsoon to promote agricultural production. The Court of Wards followed regular and strict methods to collect regular revenue from ryots and collected rent at a favourable price. Between 1881 and 1887 Court of Wards got the arrear amount and interest Rs. 25, 84,892. Ramnad Zamin paid off entire arrears of *peshcush* by October 1889.130 The conditions of the ryots improved in the beginning of twentieth century. The government passed Madras Estates Land Act of 1908 which provided the ryots with occupation rights over the land and initiated protection of ryots from the suppression of Zamindars. It might be considered the better Act than the previous Acts.131

11. Overview

Before the Zamindari settlement the local chieftain played as sovereign ruler over his kingdom. The ruler of the kingdom was ultimate one who had maintained political, economic and social legitimacy over his territory. The Vellalans, Reddies and Maravans had supreme positions in the social order. On the other hand Shanans were placed in the second stage. They considered themselves superior to Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. The Maravans were considered higher than Kallans and Agambadians. Later these three communities together were called *Mukkulathor* in the twentieth century. Agambadians served as servants in the Zamindar's palace and

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129 Letter from C.S Crole to Secretary to Court of Wards, 23.06.1883.
130 Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards, 12.10.1887, 5.
Kallans served as soldiers and part of them were entertained in agricultural activities. The Rajus communities worked in the guardian of queen’s quarters of Ramnad Zamindars.

The earlier social structure changed after the introduction of the permanent settlement in Ramnad. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the great changes of political and social stratification of southern Tamil country owing to the British economic policy. In 1802 the entire southern Tamil country came under the direct control of the Company and converted the assigned poligars into Zamindars or landlords of their respective palayams, and palayams changed into Zamindari. The local chieftains were redesignated as Zamindars without any military force or political power. The introduction of Zamindari tenure in 1803 created a new social ladder in Ramnad. The British government had the top place in the ladder and Zamindars were in the second place and thirdly Mirasidars or tenants, fourthly peasants or sub tenants and lastly landless and marginalised labourers. After the implementation of the permanent settlement, Zamindars were considered landowner. Zamindars leased land to mirasidars for certain periods and collected fixed rent for the land.

Zamindars followed different methods of assessment while collecting rent from nanjai and punjai lands. They appointed karnams and other officers to collect land revenue from mirasidars and ryots. The British government, Zamindars and Mirasidars were keenly interested to collect more income from the land. Therefore they used rigid methods to collect the share of the produce from the peasants. The peasants and landless labourers always struggled to survive from the suppression of Zamindars and Mirasidars. The increase of land tax and heavy debt burden paved the way for new elite groups which were created after the agrarian crisis. The new taxes and the heavy tax burden pushed the peasants to borrow more money from money
lending communities. The negligence of irrigation sources, Zamindar’s litigations and heavy debts led the peasants to sell or mortgage the land to money lending community or Nattukottai chetties. The Nattukottai chetties of Ramnad were initially projected as traders, but gradually developed to bankers for government, Zamindars and peasants. Ultimately they had a supreme position in the social structure. In the second half of nineteenth century they became landowners of Ramnad through money lending.

Whenever the Ramnad Zamindari faced litigation issue, minority issues of Zamindar’s heir or issues of adoption of the Zamindars, the government appointed, the Court of Wards to manage the estate the issues were resolved. In this case Raja Ram Rao notes that Ramnad Zamindari was under the control of Court of Wards for twenty one years (1795-1803, 1816-1822, 1843-1846 and 1872-1889). He argues that under this control, Zamindars and peasants faced several issues and they were treated badly and the condition was very bad and he notes that under the control of Court of Wards, peoples and peasant’s condition was very good and that ryots’ problems were solved under the supervision of Court of Wards.

The Ryot of Ramnad Zamindari faced difficulties by Zamindars and the Court of Wards; because both of them indented to get more revenue from ryots not considering the welfare of the Ryots. The government made new acts to collect more land revenue and Zamindars were the tools of the government to implement its notion. The government’s economic policy towards Ramnad Zamindari was only to get more and regular income from the agrarian sector. They considered cultivators promoter of their wealth; so they wanted to save them by issuing Acts and protecting them legally from the Zamindar and government officers. Ultimately the Zamindar’s rule or government reign made peasant groups suffer and struggle for survival in the
Ramnad Zamindari. There were some wealthy peasants who filed suits against the Zamindar to oppose their occupation of land and rate of assessment in the second half of the nineteenth century. Peasants were not successful in their revenue suits because of the power and financial influence of Zamindars. In the nineteenth century, the circumstances were created new kinds of elite group in the southern Tamil society such as Money lenders; due to their influence, land right was transformed to one group of cultivator to other wealthy groups. As a result, the condition and life of peasant was horrible. They struggled for their survival weather it was the Company rule or Zamindar’s reign in the Ramnad Zamindari.