Chapter 4
Economic Transformation, Religious Conversion and Social Legitimacy in Ramnad Zamindari

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11. Overview

There was a major economic transformation that took place in the society of the Ramnad Zamindari during the second half of the nineteenth century. There was lack of proper and sincere land administration leading to economic downturn and social imbalance in Ramnad. The Zamindars’ and their managers’
mismanagement and government officials’ fake land survey were important reasons for the economic downturn. The Zamindars were spending lavishly for maintaining their prestige, festival celebrations and personal functions which compelled them to borrow money from private lenders, especially, Nattukottai chetties who traditionally hailed from a wealthy community in southern Tamil country. As the Zamindars were unable to repay their debt\(^1\), borrowed from moneylenders, they imposed new taxes\(^2\) and increased tax in the agrarian sector, thus making the peasants to been the burden of tax. Meanwhile conditions of famine and drought pushed the peasants to borrow from debt from money lenders and wealthy landlords. Unable to repay the debt and retrieve the mortgaged land, the peasant were forced to sell the land and made them volunteer as slaves to the landlord for the borrowed amount.

As an impact of Zamindari settlement in the Ramnad the ownership of land was transformed to from the landowning Maravans to the Nattukottai chetties, another wealthy group of the society. At the end of the nineteenth century the Ramnad Rajas faced heavy debt due to large expenses involved in litigation cases of Ramnad Zamindari. Therefore they started to practice of leasing land to individuals at favourable rates. In such kinds of lease known as *cowle*, the share of the government was, paid in cash instead of in grains. These were dealt to royal family members, charitable trusts and money lenders or

\(^1\) Loan due of Ramnad Zamindari to Government for the fasli 1291 (1881) Rs. 14,22,830, the balance of interest due on the loan at the beginning of the fasli was Rs. 35,546-13-4 which added with current loan amount and totally Rs. 1,06,476-1 was paid in the current fasli year. *Proceedings of the Court of Wards*, 23\(^{rd}\) June 1883. No.1845, 3.

\(^2\) Tree tax, water tax, vaikkolvari (straw tax) kalappichchai, palankatchi, padakanikai and sarasari tax (average), see chapter 2, p.28 for more explanations about these taxes. *Board of Revenue* 21.12.1882, No. 3198,19; *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee*, Part II,(Madras: Government Press, 1938), 129.
Nattukottai chetties. Nattukottai chetties became a prominent group by lending money to the Rajah of Ramnad for paying tribute to the government. The present chapter will discuss and analyse the transformation of the moneylenders into landowners, Zamindars into debtors, peasants into landless labourers and Shanans emerging to oppose the social domination of Maravans and the resulting social conflicts in the Ramnad Zamindari.

1. Chetties

Earlier those who involved in trading activities they were named title themselves as ‘Chetti’ or ‘Setti’. The Marwaries, Guzeratis and Lalas were the trading communities of the other part of the India. The Chetties mostly found in Kistna, Nellore, Cuddappa, Kurnool, Madura, Coimbatore and Madras in the Madras Presidency. The term chetti is derived from ‘sreshti’ which means chief merchant. They were mainly financiers, bankers and trustees. The classical epic Manimekalai refers to the term chetti meaning ‘traders’ and it was one of the occupation terms used to mean the ‘mercantile community’. Through the age of sangam they were denoted as the merchant communities. Later the name chetti or chettiar came to be used to indicate caste title. Some of them migrated to South East Asia and continued their traditional profession in overseas countries. During the period of the Cholas and the Pandyas the merchant community was

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3 Nattukottai Chetties community peoples were found mostly in Pudukkottai, Ramnad, Karaikudi, Devakottai and Pallathur in the southern Tamil region.
5 D. Sivakala, Trading Communities in Early Tamilagam (Kanyakumari: Nataraja Publication, 2007), 20.
known as *vaisyas* who were called ‘Yeti’. This term was later changed to ‘chetti’. Ramnad, Sivaganga and Pudukkottai were their major settlements.\(^6\)

According to the Madras Presidency Caste and Tribe Survey records, there were three kinds of classes among the *chetties* in the Madura region, such as *Nattukottai* chetties, *Ariyur* chetties and *Eriyur* chetties.\(^7\) The Beri chetties had sub clans like *Ayirathan* chetties and *Inuutran* chetties.\(^8\) S.M. Kamal mentions that the chetties had three divisions, like *Ayirai vaisiyar, Madurai chetties* and *chetties*.\(^9\) They had various sub-divisions among them, such as *Beri chetties, Nagarattar chetties, Kasukkarar chetties, Lanka chettis, Kuthirai chetties* and *Nattukottai chetties*.\(^10\) C.D. Maclean classifies them as *Beri chetties, Comaties/Komattis, Bunniahs, Marwaries, Oilmongers* and *Cashcaurar*. The Cometies claimed to be *Vaisyas*. In the South, the money lenders or bankers were called *Cashcaurer*.\(^11\) Among the trading caste there were two major divisions like bankers and moneylenders, in southern region trading castes people were called as *kasikkarar*. Among the Chetties there was a dispute between *Komatti chetties* and *Beri chetties* on social status. *Komatti* chetties considered themselves superior to *Beri* chetties.\(^12\) Some of the people, called themselves chetties, like *Velan chetties* who lived in Srivilliputtur and Rajapalayam areas. They worshipped their god ‘Pattani’. The *Saliyar* community people who lived in

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\(^6\) R. Lakshminaranayan, *Chettinad* (Chennai: Pavai Publication), 46-49.


\(^9\) Kamal, *Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal*, 60.


Thiruchuli and Aruppukottai considered themselves as Chetties. The Manjaputhu chetties were the earlier settlers at Pamban. In north western part of India, trading communities were known as Oswals, Agarwalas and Tatis. Nattukottai chetties settled at Nattukottai in the Madurai region and had migrated from the Chola Kingdom to the Pandya territory during the classical age. Historians opine that the term ‘nattukottai’ literally means ‘a country fort’; D. Sivakala states that ‘nattukottai’ is a corruption from “Nattarasankottai”, a small village near Sivaganga. The Chetties were known as Nagarathars. Pamela G Price opines that Nattukottai chetties’ maritime trading activities started in the eighth century. The Setupathis’ Copper plates do not mention the name of Nagarathar or Nattukottai chetties.

2. Early History, Migration and Commercial Activities of Chetties up to the 16th Century

They began their money lending business as small scale industries in the sixteenth century but their commercial activities were known since 1000 A.D. There are different legends or traditional views about the origin of Nattukottai chetties. One among the story was that, they originally lived in Kaverippattinam.

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14 Ramasamy, Tamil Nadu District Gazeteers Ramanathapuram, 934.
16 Sivakala, Trading communities in Early Tamilagam,23.
17 Lakshminarayan, Chettinad, 46-49.
18 Price, Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India,12-13; Kamal, Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal,61.
located near Kumbakonam and migrated to Madura as the Chola king demanded matrimonial alliance with them. They refused the king’s wishes and migrated to Madura region. But there are no clear details about the name of the Chola ruler who demanded to marry their girl. According to K.S. Ramasamy Sastri, among the Nattukottai chetties there were three subdivisions such as Sundaram, Ariyur and Ilayattakkudi.  

E. Thurston also argues that they migrated a thousand years ago from Kaverippattinam and they settled in Tirupathur and Devakottai divisions which were within the territory of the Sivaganga and Ramnad Zamindaris. They have been known as the Jews of South India for their traditional occupation of money-lending. According to K.K. Pillay, the Nattukottai Chetties migrated to Nattukottai about a thousand years ago from the town Kaverippattinam owing to the harassment of the Chola monarch.

The tale of the migration of the chetties to Ramnad was after the Chola kings killed the chetti women and ruined their business as they disobeyed his authority. Another fiction was that the Pandyan king requested the merchants’ services from the Chola king and the Chola King sent chetti community people to Pandyan-controlled territory including Ramnad. The Nattukottai Chetties originally came from Chola country and settled in seventy eight villages, these villages were known as Chettinad. Chettinad was covered by northern part of river Vellar (Pudukkottai); Vaigai River in the south; western side by Piranmalai

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and eastern side was covered by Bay of Bengal.\textsuperscript{24} The Nattukottai chetties were called \textit{Nagarathars}; since eighth century onwards they had been involved in maritime trading activities. Initially the Nattukottai chetties emerged as itinerant merchants of salt; later in the early nineteenth century they expanded their commercial activities to Southeast Asia. European imperialism gave them the opportunity to expand their trading activities. Chettinad lies on the north-eastern side of Sivaganga, north-western side of Ramnad and southern part of Pudukkottai.\textsuperscript{25} During the period of the later Pandyas, the Chetties were involved in oil mill industry. These people are mentioned in inscriptions like \textit{sakkarapadiyar, mayilatti} and \textit{sothi nagaraththar}. They built large oil mills, in Karaikudi; therefore that place was called \textit{Sekkalaikottai}. The Ramnad Setupathis collected \textit{sekku irai} (oil mil tax) from the Chetties of this region. This section of the community was called \textit{Vanika} chetties.\textsuperscript{26}

\section*{3. Trade and Banking Activities of the Nattukottai Chetties since the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century}

The Muslims of Coromandal coastal region classified themselves into several groups, like Ravuttans or Taragans, Marakkayar, Lebbai and Deccani. The Islamic Tamil literature denotes owner of the ship was known as Marakkala Rayan in the nineteenth century. Among the Muslims who connected with maritime trade they were known as Marakkayar. The Marakkayar of Kilakkarai

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 12-13
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 12-13; Kamal, \textit{Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal}, 60.
\end{itemize}
was the main town of trade during the period of sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries. One of the main businessmen Vallal Seethalathi or Periathambi was
lived in this town. The chank export was the supreme products of this town
during the period of nineteenth century.\(^{27}\) The divisions of Marakkayar Muslims
engaged in fishing activities called as ‘Sammatis’. They used the vessel for
fishing called ‘Samban’. The Marakkayar Muslims fisherman of Ramnad coastal
region was known as ‘Sammatti’.\(^{28}\) The early Muslims of Coromandal was
known as ‘Sonakar’ or ‘Sonakan’ since eighth century they were called as
Yavanas as Sonakar. The Ramnad Marakkayars of coastal region called as
Sonakar during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Among the Muslims
those who involved in fishing activities they were known as ‘Sonakan’ and their
settlement was named as Sonakavadi or Sonaka patti. The old name of
Kayalpattanam was called as Songapattanam.\(^{29}\) The Coromandel Muslims some
of them called as Thulukkar, who were native of Turkey.\(^{30}\) The earlier Muslim
settlements of coastal region functioned as guilds that were called as Anjuvannam
which found in the copper plate and inscriptions of twelfth and thirteenth century.
The term Anjyvannam, a Persian word which means ‘assembly’.\(^{31}\) Chetties and Marakkayar Muslims maintained a fine tie up with the Zamindar of
Ramnad. The Marakkayars sold conch shells and pearls to maritime markets and

\(^{27}\) J. Raja Mohamad, “Maritime Activities Economy and Social Customs of the Muslims of
Coromandel Coast 1750-1900,”(Ph.D dis., Pondicherry University, 1997), 25.
\(^{28}\) S.M. Kamal, Muslimkalum Thamizakamum (Madras: Islamic Studies and Culture Centre,
1990), 49.
\(^{29}\) Raja Mohamad, “Maritime Activities Economy and Social Customs of the Muslims of
Coromandel Coast 1750-1900,” 42.
\(^{30}\) Yazhpanta Manippayarath, Chandrasekara Pulavar, American Mission Press, Jeppna, 1842,
Koyilozhugu. Cited in Raja Muhammad, 21.
\(^{31}\) Jas. Burgess, ed., Epigraphia Indica of the Archaeological Survey of India, Vol. II (Calcutta:
Government Press, 1892), 68.
got back horses for the Maravans’ army. Therefore Setupathis protected Marakkayars from the intrusion of the Dutch in coastal trade. David Rudner and Heiko Schrader state that the Nattukottai Chetties’ were initially involved in salt trade in the locale of ninety six villages in the northern part of Ramnad in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. But by the early seventeenth century they emerged as itinerant merchants of salt and they expanded their trading activities into Southeast Asia by the early nineteenth century. Heiko Schrader notes that they changed their notion from maritime trade to money lending in the mid-nineteenth century. The Nagarathars lived mostly in the northeast part of Sivaganga, north western part of Ramnad and southern part of Pudukkottai which is known as Chettinad. Nagarathars were settled in other countries like Ceylon (Srilanka), Burma, Malaya, Siam, South-Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, Mauritius and South Africa.

In the colonial period they were a wealthy community. During nineteenth century, the Nattukottai chetties expanded their money lending and trading business into other countries like Malaya, Ceylon, Burma and China. According to Heiko Schrader, “Chettiaris were involved in finance trade, rice mills and some in agriculture in the Madras Presidency. During the colonial rule, the chetties

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33 Later they were settled in main centre of Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Tirumangalam, Sattankudi, Palayampatti and Arupukkotai. These are the six towns of Ramnad. Kamudi was the main town of Shanans’ settlement in Ramnad Zamindari; Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 97.
were allowed to collect revenue before 1778; but later this right was abolished”.36

W. Francis noted that Nattukottai chetties were wealthy money lenders with headquarters in the Tirupathur and Devakottai divisions of the Sivaganga and Ramnad Zamindaries in Madura District.37

4. Emergence of New Elite Groups and Peasant Migration

The British economic policy and the Zamindars’ indulgence with borrowed money and their consequent indebtedness, their putting the entire tax burden on the peasants led to the formation of new elite groups in the society. Among these emerging groups the Nattukottai chetties played a major role in the political and social order. The continuous tax burden made the peasants poor and forced them to pay higher rent for land amount which led to more debts and oppressing in the hands of the money lending community. The unsettled debts made them mortgage or sell their land to money lending groups and migrate to other areas.

The British imposed and increased agricultural share and tax which caused sale of food grains by the ryots to compensate for cultivation of commercial crops. The entry of the commercial crops in the agriculture sector created and promoted starvation in all the seasons. The commercialisation of agriculture38 created unending problems among the tenants or peasants. The commercialisation of agriculture increased the revenue of the government but the

37 Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. V, 250.
38 If ryots cultivated commercial products like Cotton, Tobacco, etc. who will get tax exemption from the water tax from well; Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee, Part II, 146.
status of ryots became more underprivileged. These causes led to increasing poverty, sale or mortgage, transfer of land; and the peasant became debtors. Commercialisation of agriculture augmented the debt of peasants in India which rose from Rs 3,000 million in 1911 to as 18,000 million in 1938, a six fold increase.\textsuperscript{39}

In the 1850’s due to arrears of \textit{peshcush} to the Company and the mismanagement of the Zamindari, the Setupathis became dependent on financial creditors or Nattukottai chetties. Gradually, their credit or loan increased and Zamindars leased some villages to creditors for the compensation of the loans. Ramnad Zamindars borrowed more amounts for administrating and spent it for litigation. Most of the land revenue was utilised for the litigation by the Zamindars; thus they did not give emphasis to irrigation sources. For maintaining the administration and litigation cost, Zamindars borrowed lump amounts of money from the lending community. Later they could not repay their debts and they gave some villages to chetties as lease for the compensation of the debt. During the second half of nineteenth century the Zamindars began to lose their financial power because of the suits of \textit{Nagarathars} or Nattukottai chetties against the Ramnad Zamindars in Madura court.\textsuperscript{40} During Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar (1846-1862), Zamindarini of Ramnad leased twenty four villages of Devakottai to Devakottai Nagarathar Arunachalam. Again in the 1860s and 1870s Muthuramalinga Setupathi II (1862-73) had to mortgage some other


\textsuperscript{40} Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 94.
villages to Arunachalam.\textsuperscript{41} The two villages of Nitchangudi, in Pallimadam Taluk and Kilachambadacky village of Muthukulathur taluk, granted lease under the \textit{cowle} tenure for forty years in 1868 and 1869.\textsuperscript{42} According to N. Rajendran, in the southern Tamil country, two capital communities played an important role. One was Kallidaikurichy Brahmins (Tinnevelly district) and the other was Nattukottai chetties of Chettinad. The outsiders like \textit{Marwaris} were the other important capitalists in the southern Tamil country. In 1896, the total numbers of the chetties were around 10,000; but later they increased and dominated socially.\textsuperscript{43}

During sixteenth century, the invasion of Muslim troops led to agricultural caste’s mass migration into southern Tamil country. The agricultural caste (\textit{Pallans} and others) migrated to Ramnad in the sixteenth century and other castes like \textit{Udaiyar} farmers of northern Tamil region, pastoralists, shepherds, accountants, tank-diggers, weavers, artisans and Telugu speaking people of Andra migrated to southern Tamil country. Jesuit records noted that several castes of Ramnad migrated from northern region to Ramnad during the sixteenth century. Agricultural castes like \textit{Vellalans}, \textit{Muthalis}, \textit{Ahambadiyans}, \textit{Kallans} migrated from Thondaimandalam to Pandya Mandalam during the period of Adondai Chakravarti. \textit{Gounders} came from Andra and Kannada countries.\textsuperscript{44} David Washbrook notes that many people migrated to other territories for various

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{41} Rudner, \textit{Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars}, 66.
\textsuperscript{42} C.S. Crole, \textit{Collector of Madura, to the Acting Secretary to the Court of Wards}, 30th September 1885, 8.
\end{verbatim}
reasons like frequent wars, failure of crops, for seeking protection and for working as armed mercenaries. In 1814, one lakh people of Ramnad Zamindari migrated due to various reasons. This cause reduced the total population of the Ramnad Zamindari.\textsuperscript{45} In 1820s, the cultivators of Pallimadam taluk migrated to Tanjore and Pudukottai regions for survival.\textsuperscript{46} After the introduction of permanent settlement in Madras, owing to the high loans the cultivators, landless labourers migrated to neighbouring countries like Mauritius, South-east Africa, West Indies and Burma.\textsuperscript{47} In 1909, the report of Ceylon Labour Commission states the total number of the Tamil migration into their country was almost 42,000 people of Paraiyans, 29,000 of Pallans, 18,000 of Ambalagars (Maravans), 16,000 of Kallans, 14,000 of Vellalans, 10,000 of Agambadians and 5 of Brahmins. Madura Mission notes indicate that most of the Tamils migrated to coffee and tea gardens of Ceylon, rubber estate of Malaya. Their migration was periodical and temporary; one-fifth of the women migrated to Burma and a majority of the people migrated from southern Tamil areas.\textsuperscript{48}

5. Change of Land ownership from Maravans to Nattukottai Chetties

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new landowning community. The revenue records and Ramnad Manual provide these kinds of change of land ownership rights clearly. The pattadari ryot borrowed cash from moneylenders for promoting irrigation or cultivation owing to the

\textsuperscript{45} Madura District Records Vol. 1156,189-199; Vol.4671, 101-111.
\textsuperscript{46} Madura District Records, G.O. 25208, Vol. 4669.
increase of rent and lack of water resources that led to failure of crops. Thus *pattadaris* could not pay regular rent to Zamindars which pushed them to get more loans from moneylenders or non-agricultural castes or Nattukottai Chetties with a heavy interest rate. Tenants could not pay or clear their debts, leading to transformation of their land rights to non-agricultural groups. In the circumstance of heavy loan burden of Zamindars and peasants, the land ownership right was transformed from the agrarian community to the money lending community.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was plenty of land transformation in the Ramnad Zamindari, especially from the Zamin Maravans to Nattukottai chetties. On 26th February 1847, in the period of Parvata Vardhani Natchiyar’s Zaminship, she faced litigations from Muthu Veerayi Nachiyar who was the adoptive mother of Ramasami Setupathis. Parvata Vardhani Nachiyar gave twenty three villages to Muthu Veerayi for withdrawing the case; she gave these villages to Sivasami Tevar who was her adopted son. In the 1850s, he had sold these twenty three villages to A.L.A.R Ramasami Chettiar for unpaid debt.\(^\text{49}\)

The Zamindars leased\(^\text{50}\) most of the villages to Chetties for the reimbursement of borrowed loan. Zamindars were in a position to mortgage some villages to reduce their debt to Nattukottai chetties. Therefore, in the 1860s and the early 1870s two taluks of Ramnad were mortgaged to two Nattukottai chettiar named


\(^{50}\) In 1866, Maraneri village of Muthukulathur taluk was granted on *cowle* for twenty years to Futters Muhamed of Ramnad for Rs 140. In case of arrears of Estate, government attached *Cowle* village to Ayan or *Amani* village, for example in 1884 based on Rent Recovery Act VII of 1865 attached two *cowle* village Udayankurungulam (Ramnad taluk) and Puliathi (Rajasingamangalam Taluk) attached and soled for the revenue arrears and converted as *Amani* village. In 1869 the village of Udayankurungulam was leased on *cowle* to Muthusami Pillai of Ramnad for forty years. In 1870 the village Puliati was granted to Christian Pillai of Ramnad for forty years. *Letter from E. Turner, Collector of Madura to the Secretary to the Court of Wards*, 12.10.1887, 5; Vialur of Muthukulathur taluk granted *cowle* lease to Nagur Mira Rowthan of Abiramam for 20 year in 1861.*Court of Wards* 23.06.1883 No.1815.
Chidambaram and Subramaniyam. Further, three divisions were leased to two cousins of Chettiar, namely Narayan and Vairavan. Further, two more divisions of the Ramnad taluk were mortgaged to Ramanathan Chettiar for the Zamindar’s heavy loan.\textsuperscript{51} Mostly the petty landholders of the ryots were depending on \textit{sahukar} (money lenders) for payment of land assessment. They repaid the amount partly from their land yielding and partially from earning by labour.\textsuperscript{52} In the 1870s, Ramnad Zamindars planned to lease villages for getting more revenue from the land, thus the village of Kuvarkuttam in Muthukulathur taluk was granted as \textit{cowle}\textsuperscript{53} lease for thirty years; but in 1878 the \textit{Cowldar} failed to pay the \textit{porruppu} (annual lease amount), therefore Courts of Wards was incorporated the village in the \textit{ayen}.\textsuperscript{54}

During the nineteenth century, Nattukottai chetties of Chettinad were capital controllers, who played a vital role in providing credit and banking services in the agrarian society. In Ramnad and Sivaganga \textit{inam} land and \textit{ayen} villages came under Nattukottai Chetties’ control. \textit{Devastanam} and \textit{Chattram} villages also came under their control and they rebuilt and administrated major temples. During the period between 1880 and 1924 they took 34 villages and 58 tanks as lease and endowed Kalayarkovil temple and repaired the temple’s tank of the Sivaganga Zamindari.\textsuperscript{55} In the southern part of the Ramnad Zamindari, due to the mortgage and indebtedness, 40 to 75 percent of the land ownership was passed into the hands of new social groups comprising of (i) \textit{Manjakuppam}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[51] Price, \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 104.
\item[52] Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 78.
\item[53] Certain village leased for individual to certain period for the fixed rent or \textit{porruppu}
\item[54] Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 490-492.
\end{footnotes}
chetties (who were the professional money lenders) (ii) Muslim trading community and (iii) Udayar, Shanans, Yadavas, etc. The Zamindars of Devakottai who were mostly Nattukottai chetties controlled tenants in their territories. Chetties’s pannai or private land in the villages, Maravans appointed as munsifs or revenue officers who collected melvaram shared from their land.

From the 1900’s onwards they began to divert their funds from money lending to industrial line. They invested more capital in industrial lines during the twentieth century. This community selected the textiles industry as their initial investment target. Prior to 1900, textile sector has been invested with little amounts from south Indian entrepreneurs. Most of the capital invested in textile had come from local British traders. The chetties’ investments in industry as a whole were not meagre, given the conditions of colonial rule and the weak pace of industrialisation in Madras. In 1907, Vairavan Chettiar and M.L.M Ramanathan Chettiar invested seven lakh rupees in the Kamatchi mill project, while Somasundaram Chettiar invested six and half lakh in Kaleeswara mill at Coimbatore.

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6. Shanans: Toddy Tappers to Trading Community

Shanans\(^{59}\) were engaged in toddy tapping or climbing tree (Panaiyeri or Panameri in Tamil) during the months from March to September. The rest of the period they were involved in agricultural work. They were mostly landless people. Some of them were landowning people but such cases were rare. Robert Hardgrave argues that there were two groups among the Shanans such as ‘climbers’ and ‘landowners’.\(^{60}\) Tinnevelly Shanans were involved in the profession of toddy tapping and were climbers of Palmyra tree. But in the case of Ramnad, they were considered as trading communities which might be due to the fact that they developed economically through trading.

Traditionally, the Shanans’ major occupation was toddy tapping and climbing Palmyra tree and production and sale of Palmyra products.

According to Robert Hardgrave, the Shanans’ home land was Thiruchendur; they migrated to Ramnad and Madurai regions in the early nineteenth century. Whereas the Shanans of Tinnevelly were given to toddy tapping and were Palmyra climbers, after the migration to Ramnad, due to their trading activities, they were considered as a trading community in the early nineteenth century.\(^{61}\) S.M. Kamal states that those who were involved in toddy tapping were called elavar, palayar, paduvar and thuvasar and their settlement was known as elacheri.\(^{62}\) The shanan vari, panag kadamai, kalava elam and

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\(^{59}\)The name of the Shanans was continued until 1911. After the census of 1911 they were changed their Shanans into Nadans or Nadars in the official records, which means lord of the land; Hardgrave, The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change, 132-136.


\(^{62}\) Kamal, & Cherif, Ramanathapuram Mavattam Varalatru Kurippugal, 152.
elam punja vari were collected from Shanans during the pre-British period. The Shanans of Tinnevelly were socially oppressed by dominant castes like Maravans, Nayakkans and other caste Hindus. Whereas some of them became converts to Christianity, some remained Hindus. Gradually, Shanans economically progressed and they were the only caste to oppose the domination of the other Hindu castes especially the Maravans. Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans of the southern Tamil country mostly depended on these caste Hindus and they could not make progress economically owing to the nature of their servile occupation as agricultural labourers.

The Manual and Gazettes provide multiple explanations about the subdivisions of Shanans. Robert Caldwell argued and classified two categories among the Shanans, that during the period of later Pandyas who had superior status of Shanans were known as Nadars and later the position of lower status, like tree-climbers were called as Shanans who migrated from south Kerala to Kanyakumari. But Robor Hardgrave argued that Shanans were indigenous people of Tinnevelly. According to H. R. Pate, Shanans had five sub-divisions such as Manatan or Karukkumattaiyan, Menattan, Kodikkal or Nattati, Kavadiapurathan or Kaveripurathan, and Pulukka shanan. Edgar Thurston lists out the five divisions among the Shanans such as Karukku-pattayar, Mel-nattar, Nattati, Kodikkal and Kalla. Salem Gazette mentions that two divisions there among the Shanans such as Kongu Shanans and Kalyana Shanans. According

63 Kamal, Setupathi Mannar Seppedugal, 61.
64 David Ludden, Peasant History in South India (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1985), 47.
66 Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. VI, 376-377.
to Census report of 1871, Shanans of southern Tamil country came migrated to and from Ceylon. Shanans were traders, cultivators, toddy-drawers, among them five per cent entertained in trading, 20.8 per cent involved in cultivating, 13.7 percent connected with food, drinks and stimulants, 17.2 percent of Shanans were labourers. The palm cultivators of Malabar and Travancore were known as ‘Tiyars’, in Canara ‘Billawar’, northern or Telugu districts called as ‘Idaiyas’.68 Tanjore Gazette states that there were three groups like Tennan (Coconut), Panan (Palmyra) and Eetchan (wild date).69 According to S.M. Kamal, Shanans had two sub-castes among them, such as Thakshina Mara Nadan and Hindu Nadan.70 Robert Caldwell opines that Shanans migrated to Tamil country from the northern coast of Ceylon. To support his view he gives the information how the caste Shandror in Ceylon came to be known in its corrupt form of Shanans.71 David Ludden viewed that, Shanans migrated from southern Travancore to Tinnevelly district during the early nineteenth Century.72 Edgar Thurston states that Shanans was considered as the equal meaning of ‘Sanror’ which literally means ‘learned’ or ‘noble people’.73 Some other reasons also supporting this argument are the Shanans of southern Tamil country had several other names like Elavar, Tiyans etc. Robert Hardgrave argues by differentiating the Shanans as ‘climbers’ and ‘landowners’. Hardgrave notes that Shanans were a landowning community, because they paid land tax as well as tree tax.

70 Kamal, & Cherif, Ramanathapuram Mavattam Varalatur Kurippugal, 152.  
71 Ramaswami Sastri, The Tamils, People, their History and Culture, Vol.3, 44.  
72 Papers Relating to the Revenue Settlement of Tinnevelly (Chennai : Tamil Nadu Archives), 83-97.  
73 Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol .VI, 294; Pate, Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevelly, Vol. I, 125.
Shanans of Aruppukottai, Virudhunagar and Palayampatti purchased land in Madurai on east Masi street in 1813.\textsuperscript{74} Rhenius noted in 1827 “among them (Shanans) there are rich and poor, high and low, intelligent and ignorant, masters and servants, proprietors of land, trees and villages and labourers... their main occupation was cultivation of Palmyra tree (*Borassus Flabelliformis*), others were involved in merchandize”\textsuperscript{75}

7. **Economical Growth and Social Status of Shanans**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, most of the Shanans of southern Tinnevelly were engaged in climbing Palmyra trees. Some of the Shanans were engaged in trading activities, using the Palmyra products, dried fish and salt. Initially they performed their trade in Ramnad Kingdom by using bullock carts. Gradually, they made *pettai* or trading centre in Ramnad and later they migrated and settled in the new trading centre. They moved from Tiruchendur via Tenkasi and settled in Ramnad. They first settled in the town of Sivakasi in 1821 and later they spread across Virudhunagar (Virudupatti), Tirumangalam, Sattankudi, Palayampatti and Aruppukottai, all these town, were called ‘Six Towns of Ramnad’.\textsuperscript{76} Later Kamudi was also one of the major settlements of Shanans.

Turnbull’s survey of Ramnad region noted that in 1814, Aruppukottai of Ramnad zamindari some of the Shanans were settled as wealthy traders. Their

\textsuperscript{74} Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 104.
\textsuperscript{76} Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 96-97.
trading activities had begun in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Shanans developed by trading and mercantile activities in Ramnad during the nineteenth century. They gained importance as mediators and moneylenders of Ramnad. In Ramnad, Shanans were wealthy and hired the Maravans as their palanquin bearers; it shows the economical growth and social status of Shanans in the nineteenth century. In Coimbatore, Salem and Trichinopoly districts most of the Shanan businessmen called themselves as ‘Chetties’ and ‘Pillai’. In the 1860s, the Shanans were well developed in economical status and started to claim a superior status or equal status to caste Hindus. They gradually started to practise Brahmnic rituals and Sanskritised aspects of life.

The Shanans were considered as inferior to Sudras by so-called caste Hindus. But the Shanans considered themselves superior to Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkilyans of the agricultural community, which were considered polluted castes by Shanans, because of their food habits. The Shanans were found throughout Ramnad, but their presence was more in Kamudi and Pallimadam Taluk. Among these people, many of them were engaged in agriculture and trade in later days. Thus Shanans formed a wealthy social group as some of them were land owning people, some of them involved in cultivating and the rest of them in the merchant and trading activities.

Earlier, Shanans were treated badly by the high caste Hindus owing to their poor economical status. The Shanans realised this and tried to improve

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economically and changed their traditional occupation to trading. So they dynamically changed their life pattern. They entered cotton industries in Virudhunagar, Sattur, Thirumangalam and Tuticorin which were the important trading centres of the Shanans. The term ‘Shanan’ was officially changed in the 1911 census, as they were unwilling to project their caste as ‘Shanan’ which directly indicated their traditional profession of toddy tapping and tree climbing. After the growth of their economical aspect they were eager to show their identity as Kashtriyas. Therefore, they were willing to be called Nadan or Nadar which means ‘lord of the land’. G.T. Boag denoted that “the Shanans of 1911 now appears as a Nadar or Nadans; this, done under the order of the government of Madras, that is word Shanans should cease to be used in officials records,....... in deference to the wishes of the Nadar community.”


8. Social Imbalance and Religious Conversion

The social imbalance, inequality and discrimination in the Tamil society forced the Shanans to convert to Christianity to get social status and social respect among other caste Hindus. The Christian Missionaries primarily started their work of spreading the Christian ideology among the common people who suffered socially and economically. They utilised the social discrimination and inequality prevailing in Indian society to convert the people to their religious faith. Paravans or fishers were initially converted to Roman Catholic Christianity to secure their social and economic status. Later, the Shanans’ converted to
Christian faith for getting social honour. Paraiyans and some of the Pallans and other castes were willing to follow the Christian religions.

Most of the Vellalans, Chetties, Maravans, Kallans and Agambadians were not interested in conversion to the Christian religions. Rarely can we find evidence for conversion of these people into other religions, because there was no need to change their religious status to improve their social respect. In case of the marginalised people and socially oppressed people, they were willing to covert the Christianity to get social value. Thus there was no way for caste Hindus to change their identity or religion in the Ramnad Zamindari. The ruling Maravans were staunch followers of the Saiva Hindu sect, However patronised all Hindu sects and other religions. During the reign of Kilavan Setupathis, he did not agree to royal family members following the Christian faith. Therefore, he initially warned and later persecuted and killed John De Britto of the Jesuit Mission for his activities of conversion in the Ramnad region. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Setupathis patronised all the religions and tolerated the propagation of the Christian faith in the Ramnad Zamindari. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of Christians gradually increased which is shown in the census records. The Christian Missionaries provided education, professional status and home to the converted people and thereby increased the number of converts to Christianity.

In Southern Tamil Country, Christianity was first introduced on the west coast from early time of Saint Thomas. The Portuguese made much effort to conversion in the sixteenth century, later Roman Catholics and Protestant made the Southern Tamil country as their platform to their religious conversion. In
1600 onwards Christian missionaries started their conversion activities in the Madura district and Ramnad region. Three major Missionaries played key roles in the Ramnad Zamindari such as the Roman Catholic Mission, S.P.G Mission (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and the American Mission. Among the Christian Missionaries the Roman Catholic Mission was the earliest and largest in the Ramnad Zamindari. The Roman Catholic Mission churches were built in Sargani, Kockurani, Suranam, Muthupettai, Kamudi, Pamban and Ramnad. Among these churches, the Muthupettai church was endowed by Muthuramalinga Setupathi (1780-1781), who donated Tenjiendal village of Ramnad taluk to the church. According to H. R. Pate, Shanans formed the bulk of the protestant community and half of the number of the Roman Catholics.

The Madura Mission, a Jesuit mission chose the southern Tamil country for its mission to spread Christianity. The Catholic Mission made the Tamil language their mode for preaching their ideas. Hence, they tried and knew about the language and culture of the region and translated Tamil literature to other languages to know the culture of the Tamil country. Christianity played an essential role in the development of the depressed people in the Tamil society. The social inequalities based on the economic disparities created a social hierarchical order, where there was no place for the marginalised people or landless labourers. The Christian Missionaries utilised this uneven social order to

81 Ramasamy, Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram, 163.
82 Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 136-141.
spreading the Christian ideology to convert the masses to Christianity from the sixteenth century onwards. In the initial step, they started their work by starting schools to promote their ideology. Initially, the Paravans and Mukkuvans (fishing community) were converted to Christianity, followed by Kammalans, Pallans, Vanniyan, Cheruman, Chakkiliyan and other depressed groups of people.\(^8^5\)

In 1685, Jesuit missionaries under Father Borghese who was the first resident missionary placed at Kamanayakkanpatti carried out his conversion work among the Shanans at Vadakkankulam, Nanguneri taluk, Tuticorin.\(^8^6\) In same year, a church was built at Vadakkankulam, in Tuticorin and the Church act of 1698 recognised that the Company could support missionaries who started charity schools in Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Ramnad and Sivaganga. With efforts of Fr. Schwartz of the SPG Mission, a permanent mission was started in 1701. The ‘Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge’\(^8^7\) (SPCK) was established in Madras for spreading Christianity. In 1717 SPCK missionaries started two charity schools for promoting the poor people in Madras. They used education as a tool to promote their ideology among the people. As a result Reverend Swartz established English Schools at Tanjore, Ramnad and Sivaganga initially. The Jesuit missionaries made Trichinopoly the centre for their mission. They targeted marginalised people to enhance their religious following and for that they utilised

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\(^8^7\) In 1698 SPCK founded by Thomas Bray. [http://spckpublishing.co.uk/about-spck/mission](http://spckpublishing.co.uk/about-spck/mission)
the caste discriminations followed in the Indian Society.\textsuperscript{88} In 1720, Jesuit mission converted three thousand Shanans of Vadakankulam to Christianity. The Anglican Missionary society was started in 1771 in Tinnevelly. In 1784, Rayappan was the first person who converted to Protestantism among the Shanan community.\textsuperscript{89}

In the second half of the eighteenth century, missionaries gradually lost the Company’s patronage to spread Christianity, as the Company was involved in establishing administrative setup in entire India. In the eighteenth century, the conversion to Christianity attained its zenith.\textsuperscript{90} In 1834 American Madura Mission was established by American Jaffna Mission and established new school in Madras, Ramnad and Dindigul. This protestant mission started major educational institution at Palayamkottai and Nagarcoil.\textsuperscript{91} In the 1840s, Catholic and Protestant Christian missionaries brought changes in the Shanans’ social status by conversion. Missionaries enabled Shanans to get education and professional opportunities which facilitated gradual progress and led to more conversion of Shanans to Christianity in the Ramnad Zamindari.\textsuperscript{92}

The American Mission had its headquarters at Mandapasalai in Pallimadam taluk. The English monthly magazine ‘\textit{The Banner of the Cross}’ was started to promote the Christian ideology in the second half of the nineteenth

\textsuperscript{88} Rajayyan, \textit{Tamilnadu: A Real History}, 324; Hardgrave, \textit{The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change}, 43.
\textsuperscript{90} G. Venkadesan, \textit{Tharkala Tamilnattu Varalaru 1600-2011}, (Rajapalayam: VC Publication, 2011), 170-172
\textsuperscript{91} Rajayyan, \textit{Tamilnadu: A Real History}, 324.
\textsuperscript{92} Ramasamy, \textit{Historical Dictionary of the Tamils, Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Culture}, 38-40.
century. In 1873, S.P.G Mission converted 361 persons into Christianity and it was increased to 4,123 in 1889 and their establishment of Schools increased from 179 to 1228. The Christian missionaries especially S.P.G. Mission formed two large orphanages for boys and girls after great famine of 1876-77. The Missionaries treated people equally with social service activities, attracting the marginalised people towards Christianity.

Due to the existence of several groups and divisions among the Shanans they lacked unity in the first two decades of nineteenth century. The Shanans of Ramnad whether Hindu or Christian, formed mahimai for uniting them into one group. The Shanan merchants and businessmen’s contribution amount to mahimai was spent for the welfare of the Shanans community. For controlling the mahimai activities they appointed a head known as uravinmurai. Most of the Shanans migrated from Tinnevelly to Ramnad and Madurai due to the ill treatment of the caste Hindus. Having settled in Ramnad and Madurai as traders and merchants, the migrated Shanans felt that they were a minority among other castes and planned to unite other Shanans into one group and therefore they established ‘uravinmurai’. Gradually Shanans achieved economic progress as traders and money-lenders in Ramnad and adopted Sanskritised cultural practices to get social superiority and equality with other caste Hindus.

9. Economic Transformation, Social Legitimacy and Caste Conflict

Comparatively, the Shanans achieved more economic progress than the Maravans. The Maravans faced economic crisis while, the Shanans economically progressed. In the 1860s, the British abolished kaval system in the southern Tamil country. As a result, the source of income was affected for Maravans. Consequently they could not tolerate the growth of the Shanans, economically and socially. The resulting rivalry between the two social groups was the main cause behind the caste conflict in the Ramnad and Tinnevelly region. The Ramnad Setupathis of the Maravan community were considered superior to Shanans. The Setupathi was the controller of all the temples (Dharmakartha) of the Ramnad region. The Shanans were socially treated as untouchables and lower than caste Hindus. Therefore, they were banned to enter the Hindu temples. Initially Shanans were inferior in the economical status so they were socially oppressed. With their economic growth they started to claim their social identity and honour in the second half of nineteenth century. They were the pioneers among the oppressed sections of the southern Tamil country who began to struggle against caste domination. They stood against the caste Hindus and their social discriminations.

The Shanans’ opposition of the caste domination through the temple entry struggle was initiated at Kanyakumari in Travancore state during the mid-eighteenth century. The Temple entry struggle of Kanyakumari effort was done by means of the effect of Muthukutti Swamigal’s efforts. Since mid-eighteenth

century onwards the Shanans were entered into fight for their equal rights in the social order. From Travancore Shanans’s resistance spread to southern Tamil country. Christianity played a major role in this disparity by providing a ladder to the oppressed people to uplift themselves in the social setup.97

As the Shanans progressed and economically developed owing to their trading and commercial activities, they aspired for a higher social status. The economic development promoted them to declare themselves as equal to Vellalans and Maravans of wealthy and rich castes. This economic progress pushed them to struggle for their rights. In the second half of nineteenth century, Shanans entered into a struggle for their social honour and opposed the upper caste domination and discriminations. In 1858, the Shanans of Travancore resisted the state and refused to follow the custom of not wearing upper garment. In 1860, there was a resistance of Shanans against Maravans at Aruppukottai and Palayampatti of Pallimadam taluk.98 In 1870s Shanans initiated a battle to claim their place in the social order through the Temple Entry struggle in Tiruthangal and Madurai in the Southern Tamil country. By 1870 Shanans of Tinnevelly, tried to enter the Tiruchendur Temple where Brahmins and Pillais or Vellalans were opposed. In 1874, under the head of Mooka Nadar, Shanans entered Madurai Minakshi Temple and worshiped the goddess. Following this event Tiruthangal Murgan Temple entry stands as an evidence for the Shanan protest against the caste domination. In 1879 a group of Shanans attempted to enter the

97 Rajayyan, Tamilnadu A Real History, 371-372.
temple of Sundareswara in Kamudi. In 1885 Shanans attempted to entry to the street of Gollapatti, Sattur taluk, Tinnevelly district. As a result of this protest, four Maravans and three Shanans were killed. From the 1880s onwards the disturbance and tension between the Shanans and Maravans was a recurrent incident. The Kalugmalai Riot in Tinnevelly district was one such incident.

9.1. Kalugumalai Riot (7th April 1895)

In the 1890s the Shanans’ adoption of Sanskritised customs and practices like wearing sacred thread and dhotis like Brahmins, practiced in Sivakasi, was disliked by Vellalans and Maravans, as they did not like Shanans to maintain customs equally with them. In 1895 Shanans of Tinnevelly appealed to the British to appoint the Shanans to Tinnevelly temple committee for managing the Siva Temple. But this attempt failed. The Social mobility of Shanans and their claims to positions of influence and power resulted in the emergence of caste conflict in the southern Tamil country.

Kalugumalai lies in Tinnevelly district; it was a part of the Ettaiyapuram Zamindary. Ettaiyapuram Zamindar was the trustee of the Kalugumalai Temple. In 1890s the Shanans population of Kalugumalai was about 500 and Maravans were numbered 475, the majority of Shanans were converted to Roman Catholic and laid claims to Kshatriya status. By 1891, among 4,10,000 of Shanans about 1,50,000 were converted to Roman Catholic. The economic development, social

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100 Pate, Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevelly, Vol. I, 126.
mobility and religious conversion were the major causes for the caste conflict in the southern Tamil country. The Zamindar of Ettayapuram as the trustee of the local temple, had obtained an injunction restraining the Shanans from using the temple’s car street for religious processions. The Shanans of Kalugumalai, after conversion to the Roman Catholic mission, bought a shop in the car street of Kalugumalai and converted into a prayer hall, which was considered as a chapel. The mission constructed a pandal or roof in front of the new chapel or prayer hall. The Hindus were celebrating the car festival, and when the car crossed the street the pandal had to be removed to allow passage for the temple car to proceed. This annoyed the seventy Shanans who had stood guarding the pandal and they retaliated by throwing stones on the Hindus groups leading to the death of the Brahmin manager of the Ettayapuram Zamindari. This incident aggravated the animosity between the Shanans and the high caste Hindus, especially the Maravans of Kalugumalai. In the ensuing riot seven Shanans and two members of the Ettaiyapuram Zamindari were killed and the Shanan quarters were burnt and looted by Maravans. Ultimately, at the behest of the Zamindar, the British government deployed additional police forces and suppressed the riot in March 1899.

In 1895 again the Shanans attempted to enter Thiruthangal and Sivakasi Temples but these efforts were suppressed by high caste Hindus and officials. In 1896, Shanans tried to enter the Siva temple at Sivakasi, but this too was suppressed by the government with armed forces. The Sivakasi robbery on April

26, 1899, during which the Maravans, Vellalans, Pallans and Muslims looted the Shanan commercial settlement as the economic advancement of the Shanans earned them the rivalry of Maravans, Vellalans, and Muslim traders.\textsuperscript{105}

### 9.2. Sivakasi Riot (6\textsuperscript{th} June 1899)

Sivakasi, was one of the major commercial town of Shanans in Tinnevelly district. Sivakasi emerged as the commercial centre of the Shanans in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The census of 1881, states that more than 13 per cent of the Tinnevelly district population were Shanans and about 9 per cent were Maravans.\textsuperscript{106} The census of 1891, noted that the total population of Sivakasi town was 12,184, among them 10,678 were Hindus; Muslims were 1,359 and Christians 147. The Shanan people constituted 805 of the total number of Hindus of Sivakasi and Maravans were around 500. Therefore the Shanans formed the majority population.\textsuperscript{107} Both the Sivakasi and Kalugumalai riots had similar events of temple entry which led to the conflict between warrior community (Maravans) and the emerging trading community (Shanans). Comparatively the Shanans were economically well advanced than Maravans. The Maravans faced severe economic problems during the second half of nineteenth century, the period the progress of Shanans. Due to the abolition of the kaval system by the British, the Maravans lost not only their income but their prestige as well. Thus they could not accept the growth of the Shanans


\textsuperscript{106} Ludden, \textit{Peasant History in South India}, 25.

economically and socially. Therefore they tried to check the progress of the Shanans, which was the main cause behind the caste conflict in the southern Tamil country.\textsuperscript{108}

M. Hammick was the Inspector General of police appointed as investigator of Sivakasi riot. On 20th April 1899, some of the Maravans instigated the Chakkiliyans to wear the sacred threat and enter the Shanans temple in the outskirts of Sivakasi.\textsuperscript{109} The basic cause of the Sivakasi riot was the resentment of the Maravans for being economically dependent on the Shanans of Sivakai and in the northern part of Tinnevelly. The famine condition was another major cause as the food grains were under the control of Shanans who were traders. In this circumstance, the Maravans opposed and attacked the Shanans for contributing to their economic problems and therefore to prevent Shanans’s progress.\textsuperscript{110} On 26th April 1900, \textit{the Swadesamitran}, observed about Sivakasi riot and demanded the government to save the land owning communities from local disturbance or communal conflict.\textsuperscript{111}

\textbf{9.3. Kamudi Riot (1898-99)}

Kamudi in Ramnad zamindari is located forty miles south of Sivakasi. The temple of Kamudi is dedicated to the worship of Lord Subramania, and also

\textsuperscript{108} Bandopadhyay, “The Origin of a Social Conflict in South India,” 73.
\textsuperscript{109} Enquiry report of Hammick, Disturbance in Madura and Tinnevelli, Judicial Department, G.O. No. 2017, dated 12 December 1899 (Chennai: Tamil Nadu Archives) Cited in Arun Bandopadhyay, 76.
\textsuperscript{110} G.O. 2013, Revenue Department, Miscellaneous, dated 6 June 1899, 6; G.O. No. 2677, Revenue Department, Miscellaneous, dated 20 July 1899, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{111} Native News Paper Report 1900, 225.
of Goddess Badrakali, Kamudi was surrounded by Maravan dominated villages. In Kamudi, Maravans were the dominant community and Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans were dependent on them. There Shanans were the minority trading caste. This town emerged as a trading town in the late nineteenth century with Shanans and Muslims as traders and merchants. Vellasami Tevar, the leader of anti-Shanan groups, banned the entry of Shanans into Kamudi temple. He hailed from the village of Pasumpon, two miles from Kamudi. He was a locally dominant person, economically wealthy and socially influential. Before him the lower class people should remove their turban, and greet him in a humble manner. In the case of Shanans, they were in no mood to give this kind of respect to him owing to their economic power. Therefore, he collected all other caste Hindus and opposed Shanan's progress above them. When on 14th May 1897, fifteen Shanans entered the Minakshi Sundareswara Temple in Kamudi. Baskarasami Setupathi, the Raja of Ramnad, filed a case against the Shanans for temple entry at Kamudi. Finally the court ordered Shanans to pay rupees 2,500 towards the cost of purifying the temple polluted by their entry.113

The Shanans of Kamudi collected fund Rs 42,000 rupees from Shanans of entire Tamil country and appealed this case to High court of Judicature in Madras and the judgement came in favour to Shanans. They appealed this case to the Privy Council in London in 1908. The Privy Council citing the resolution of Kamudi case by the High Court Judges, Benson and J. J. Moore stated that

112 P. Chidambaram Pillai, Right of Temple Entry (Chennai: MJP Publishers, 2008), 203.
“The Shanars, as a class, observed their Lordship of the High Court in their Judgement, “have from time immemorial been devoted to the cultivation of the palmyra palm and to the collection of its juice and the manufacture of liquor from it. Their own local traditions connect them with the toddy drawers of Ceylon whence the Tiyans or toddy drawers of the West Coast, are also supposed to have immigrated. There are no grounds whatever for regarding them as of Aryan origin. Their worship was a sort of demonology and their position in general social estimation appears to have been just above Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans and below that of Vellalans, Maravans and other cultivating castes usually classed as Sudras and admittedly free to worship in the Hindu temples”.114

Madras high court Judge stated that about Kamudi temple entry case “all Nadars are Shanar by caste: unless, indeed they have abandoned Caste as many of them have by becoming Christians”.115 The economic and social progress of the Shanans was the major reason to oppose and made this kind of group of struggle against higher castes. As a result, the Shanans built separate temples for themselves and they planned to settle separately. Sivakasi was the main settlement of Shanans. Ultimately, they felt that Hinduism did not give them social respect. Socially discriminated by Hinduism, they converted to Christianity where they seemingly got social respect and equality, somewhat better than what Hinduism gave them.

114 Chidambaram Pillai, Right of Temple Entry, 206-212.
115 Chidambaram Pillai, Right of Temple Entry, 212.
10. The part played by the Zamindar of Ramnad in the Caste Conflict

The Zamindar of Ramnad played an essential role in the maintenance of the social order in his estate. In the case of caste conflict between Maravans and Shanans, the Zamindars backed the Maravans as he belonged to same caste group. According to Robert Hardgrave, there was a popular rumour that the local Maravar Zamindars backed the rioting Maravans with money and Guns. A report in the Hindu newspaper even suggested that the riot was inspired by the Raja of Ramnad to put pressure on the Court to decide in his favour against the Shanans’ claim to temple entry in Kamudi. However the Raja had issued the following statement: “I possess friends among Nadar Community,” and “I am no bigot but a practical sympathizer of lower castes and foreign religions...”\(^{116}\) The Maravans wanted to maintain the status quo in with regard to their status in the social hierarchical order. The Shanans were desirous of constructing a new social order based on their newly acquired economic wealth. In this conflict the Zamindar of Ramnad always stood beside the landowning caste of Maravans, Reddies, Nayakkans and Chetties in an attempt to retain their support. The Shanans, Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans were considered below these landowning castes, whom the landed groups wanted to maintain under their control. The emergence of Shanans under the banner of Christianity was not tolerated by the landowning caste groups, especially the Maravans. They were afraid of the loss of their status in the social hierarchy. Therefore, Maravans opposed Shanans whenever they got the opportunity. In their attempt, they were backed by the Zamindar of Ramnad who depended on the landowning caste groups in

\(^{116}\) *The Hindu*, June 28, 1899, cited in Hardgrave, 118-119.
sustaining his social influence and economic power. Therefore, the Zamindar supported land owning caste groups in the upper caste resistance to Shanans’ temple entry. Apart from the Shanans, the rest of the oppressed caste groups like Pallan, Paraiyan and Chakkiliyans could not afford to oppose the Maravans during the nineteenth century owing to their dependence on the landowning groups for their existence and survival. Further, socially Zamin Maravans guarded their social supremacy and kept the landless castes always below them.

11. Overview

The socio-economic status of communities in the southern Tamil country was constructed and structuralised based on land owning and wealth. The nineteenth century witnessed changes that occurred in the social and economic order in the Ramnad Zamindari. The society was prenominated by the rich agricultural castes like Maravans, Reddies, Vellalans and Nayakkans, among the agricultural landowning groups, Maravans were faced economic crisis during the second half of nineteenth century. On the other hand, Shanans of Ramnad emerged as a wealthy community through their trading activities. The abolition of Kaval system deprived the non-zamin landowning Maravans of income as their source of income was through the village watch fee in the agrarian society. It was the main reason for the social and economic problems of Maravans in the Ramnad Zamindari. The zamin Maravans faced great economic issues of tax arrears and loan burden from government and indebtedness to private money lenders especially the Nattukottai Chetties. The luxurious life style, charitable grants, unnecessary expenses, grand festival and marriage celebrations increased
their loan and thus the debt burden of the Ramnad Zamindari. These causes pushed Ramnad Zamindars to lease and mortgage their zamin villages to private moneylenders or Nattukottai chetties. The second half of nineteenth century the economic problems of the Ramnad Zamindari and other non-zamin Maravans’ paved the way for the emergence of new landowning social groups, namely the Nattukottai Chetties who were traditionally bankers and moneylenders.

During this period the economic problems of the Zamin of Ramnad was the major reason behind the transformation of Nattukottai chetties from moneylenders to landowning groups. On the other hand, the Shanans of Ramnad progressed economically and claimed equal status with landowning agricultural castes of Maravans and others. The social imbalance and caste discrimination in the Ramnad society pushed the oppressed caste groups to convert to Christianity. They hoped, under the banner of Christianity, to get equal status in the social order. The conversion of Paravans, Shanans, Paraiyans, Pallans of the socially oppressed caste groups seriously affected the social balance prevailing in the society.

The religious conversion and economic transformation was the fundamental root for the caste conflict between Maravans and Shanans in the nineteenth century. The progress and emergence of Shanans was greatly disturbed the social order in which Maravans were higher to the Shanans in the social hierarchy. Deprived of income and economic status, the Maravans tried to prevent the progress of Shanans with the support of other social groups like the Pallans and trading Muslims whenever needed. But their intention was not fulfilled. The Shanans came forward and claimed equal status and honour along
with the Maravans and other landowning caste groups through the Hindu temple entry struggle. The second half of the nineteenth century the Shanans formed the *Mahimai* and the *Uravinmurai* and achieved solidarity against the discriminatory practices prevalent in the southern Tamil country. Their resistance and temple entry struggle led to communal riots between Shanans and Maravans during the second half of nineteenth century. Kalugumalai Riot of 1895 and Sivakasi riot 1899 of Tinnevelly district and Kamudi riot of 1899 in Ramnad zamindari were the result of a major caste conflict between the Shanans and Maravans in the nineteenth century. These three riots occurred when Shanas tried to enter Hindu temples, entry into which was prohibited by social dominated caste groups. The Temple entry struggle of Shanans was not simply to get the right to enter the Hindu temple. It symbolized their struggle for getting equal social honour and status along with other landowning caste groups. In this struggle Shanans proved their strength and they were the only community to resist against the discriminatory practises caste Hindus who were the dominated social groups in the nineteenth century. The economic changes and transformation played a vital role in the constructing the social structure in the southern Tamil country.