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

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5 R. Sathyanatha Aiyer, History of the Nayaks of Madura (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1924), 52-57; Ramasamy, Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram, 77.
6 Different spell used by Scholars and Historians, here researcher using the spelling of Setupathi which used in the Board of Revenue records. Setupathi, the hereditary title of the Raja of Ramnad, meant guardians of the Sethu or Adam’s Bridge, Tamil Lexicon, Vol III, Part I, (Madras: University of Madras, 1982), 1630.
Map 1: South Indian Mandalams, A.D. 1300

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

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

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

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\(^{11}\) T. Raja Ram Rao’s *Ramnad Manual*, 1891, spells it as ‘Dever’, whereas the researcher uses ‘Tevar’ as spelt used in *Board of Revenue* records and used by Robert Sewell and Pamela G. Price

\(^{12}\) Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 20.

\(^{13}\) Sewell, *A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India*, 89.

\(^{14}\) Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 10.
palayams for the convenience of administration. The Poligari or palayam system was originally introduced by Visvanatha Nayak (1529 - 1564). Under the system palayam meant a territorial division. The holders of the palayam were known as the Palayakarar or Poligar. The British records show that there were three regional divisions of poligars; firstly, the Tamilnadu poligars named as southern poligars, secondly, the Rayalaseema poligars or western poligars and thirdly, poligars of coastal Andra named as northern poligars. Tinnevelly, Ramanathapuram, Madura, Dindigul and Trichinopoly were important palayams in the division of southern poligars. Muthu Krishnappa Nayak designated the Setupathi of Ramanathapuram as the chief of all the southern palayams. Among the seventy-two palayams, Ramanathapuram was the largest one. A number of palayams emerged powerful in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Tinnevelly, Madura, Ramanathapuram, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Dindigul and Coimbatore were the major palayams. The palayams to the western side of Tinnevelly, Sivaganga and the Ramanathapuram palayam were ruled by the Maravan caste and Madura, Trichinopoly and Tanjore palayakarars belonged to Kallan caste. The chieftains of eastern Tinnevelly, Dindigul and Coimbatore palayams belonged to the Tottiyan or Kambalattan of Nayakkan community. The total numbers of palayams were frequently changing. During the reign of Visvanatha Nayak totally seventy-two palayams were created in the Madura country. Under the Nawabs of Arcot the number was reduced to around sixty in 1752. By the end of the eighteenth century the number of palayams was about forty six in

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16 K. Rajayyan, Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu (Madras: University of Madras, 1974), vi.
the Carnatic provinces. Setupathis emerged as powerful among the southern palayams in the end of seventeenth century. Setupathis proved their loyalty to the Madura Nayaks when the latter were in a critical situation. Thereafter Setupathis emerged as protectors of the Nayak Kingdom. When there was weakness of central power, Setupathis declared themselves as independent rulers in the second half of the seventeenth century during the period of Kilavan Setupathi (1674-1710). Kilavan Setupathi formed Pudukkottai from part of Ramanathapuram and gave it to his wife Kathali’s brother, who belonged to the Kallan caste and henceforth ruled Pudukkottai as Ragunatha Raja Thondaiman in 1686 A.D. Under these circumstances started the disintegration of Ramanathapuram kingdom.

Ramanathapuram territory was further divided into five divisions by Kattaiah Tevar or Kumara Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Setupathi (1729-1735). He kept three parts with him and the remaining parts were given to Sasivarna Tevar who was named Raja Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Periya Udaya Tevar. These two parts constituted the new domain known as Sivaganga in 1730 A.D., which was called as Chinna vadagai (small revenue division) as Ramanathapuram was called as Periya vadagai (large revenue division). Sasivarna Tevar was recognized as the ruler of Sivaganga from

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19 Price, Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India, 8.
20 In 1707 A.D Ramanathapuram Kingdom, declared its independence under Kilavan Setupathi.
21 Thiruvenkatachari, The Setupatis of Ramnad, 17-29
24 According to J.H. Nelson Sivaganga was separated from Ramnad in 1733A.D. J.H. Nelson p.250; W.W. Hunter stated that in 1729 Sivaganga was formed from Ramnad; W.W. Hunter, Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. IX (London: Trubner & Co, 1886) p.124
1730 to 1750 A.D. 25 At the same time Pudukkottai was declared its independence under Vijaya Ragunatha Thondaiman, son of Ragunatha Raja Thondaiman. 26

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

26 Pate, Madras District Gazeteers, Tinnevelly, 67; Sewell, A Sketch of the Dynasties of South India, 85.
27 Hereafter the Company
29 The Madras Presidency had twenty-one districts, such as Godavari, Kistna, Vizagapatnam, Ganjam, Cuddapah, Kurnool, Anantapur, Bellary, South Kanara, Malabar, Nilgiri, Tinnevelly, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, South Arcot, North Arcot, Madura, Chinglepet, Nellore, Coimbatore and Salem; Dharma Kumar, ‘Caste and Landless in South India,’ Comparative Studies in Society and History 4, No. 3 (1962): 339-340.
consolidated the British bureaucratic power over southern Tamil country\textsuperscript{30} during the late eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century.

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

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

\textsuperscript{30} Burton Stein used the term of ‘southern Tamil country’ which includes Madura, Ramnad, Pudukkottai, Sivaganga, Timevelly and part of Travancore. Burton, Stein, “Circulation and Historical Geography of Tamil Country” The Journal of Asian Studies, 37,1, (November 1977): 7-26.
there was no mediator between the ryot and chieftains. The zamindari system created new elite groups in the Ramnad Zamindari. The Maravans, Vellalans, Chetties, Nayakkans emerged as the major land holding and land owning castes whereas Pallans, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans landless and therefore oppressed castes. Chetties were moneylenders, traders and bankers and landowners in the Ramnad Zamindari. Shanans of Ramnad had migrated from Tinnevelly and settled as traders in Ramnad in the eighteenth century. Nayakkans, Reddies and Vellalans were landowning non cultivating castes. They used pannaiyal and padiyal for cultivating their land. Kallans and Agambadiyans were the agricultural laborers of Brahmin or Vellalans land, some of the Agambadiyans were domestic servants of the Ramnad zamindars.

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

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

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

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

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31 After the introduction of the Permanent Settlement or Zamindari tenure in the southern Tamil country, the settled *palayams* were known as Zamindari or Estate or *Samasthanam*. These three terms indicated the same position of its nature.
Madras Presidency? After the introduction of permanent settlement, what was the role of zamindars in their respective revenue divisions? How did the Zamindars maintain their power and supremacy in their territory? In what manner did rights of landownership impacted on economic and social conditions in the Ramnad Zamindari? What was the condition of landless and underprivileged people in Ramnad? What were the reasons behind the religious conversion and social transformation that took place in the Ramnad Zamindari during the period from 1803 to 1910? What were the causes and necessity for the conversion and migration of people of Ramnad? These research questions are discussed in the present work.

Statement of the problem

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

**Objectives**

The present work has the following objectives:

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

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

33 Letter from T. Raja Ram Rao, Manager, Ramnad Estate to Collector of Madura dated 5th February 1882 No. 24
34 The Seventeen taluks of the Ramnad Zamindari discussed in Chapter 1
Map 2: Study Area

Limitations and Delimitations

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

Review of Literature

The Hallow Crown: Ethno History of Indian Kingdom (1989) by Nicholas B. Dirks, explains the emergence and administration of the little kingdom of Pudukkottai and the status of hollow crown under the Company and the British colonial rule. He analyses the ambiguous political status of the princely state of Pudukkottai and uses the symbol of ‘Hollow Crown’ to indicate the Pudukkottai Raja’s political authority without concurrent powers. The present work adopts his idea of hollow crown as regards the political status of the Ramnad Zamindari and analyses how Ramnad Zamindars tried to maintain their social status and economic independence unsuccessfully. Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India, (1996), by Pamela G. Price explains the pre-colonial regime in the southern Tamil country especially in Ramnad and Sivaganga and the changes in political practice from the late seventeenth century to the late twentieth Century. She discusses about Ramnad and Sivaganga, neighboring little kingdoms in the eighteenth century, both ruled by Marava warrior clans. She analyses in detail about the rise of the Maravans and their strength and power in this region. She opposed Dirk’s concept of ‘Hollow crown’ and gave
examples to prove her views of the superior powers of Zamindars. According to her Zamindars had authority in their zamin and continued to have a high status like getting *muthal mariyathai* or *ur mariyathai* in temple rituals and conducting grand festivals to prove their social supremacy. The present work explores the power and nature of Zamindari in Ramnad and the feeble attempts of the Ramnad Zamindars to maintain a semblance of social status as they lacked complete control over land and land revenue.

A study of the impact of colonial revenue policy on a micro level society and social order is provided by Anand Yang in his *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1792-1920* (1989). Taking a single district, Saran in Bihar province, Yang makes out a case for a “Limited Raj” of the British as the colonial administration depended on the collaborative support of the rural elite, especially the Hathwa Raja, whose rise to prominence was aided by the British. Reinforced by colonial support, the landed class emerged as successful rentiers utilizing the commercialized market economy, their network of social control and the legal apparatus of the colonial government to establish their dominance over the peasantry. However, Yang has chosen to ignore the crucial role played by the caste system in the economy, wealth, power and prestige of a rural society. In contrast, David West Rudner’s *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (1992) is about the merchant banking caste of Nattukottai Chettiars of southern Tamil Nadu whose commercial activities and networks had spread beyond the seas in South East Asia as well. Rudner considers caste as a form of symbolic capital and describes how prestige, reputation and social relationships along with caste provide useful non tangible forms of capital in the deployment of material
capital. Primarily a study of capitalism, Rudner’s analysis of the intricate connections among social institutions like caste, kinship, marriage, religious practices and political institutions stresses a political economic approach. However, Rudner’s work concentrates on merchant capitalism and commercial activities leaving out landlordism and agricultural activities which form the backbone of rural economy.

*Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century* (1992) by Dharma Kumar examines the role of Indian agricultural workers in the Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century and also described the importance of agricultural labor in the first half of the nineteenth century. She gives accounts of the land, population, migration and growth of agricultural labor in the Madras Presidency in the nineteenth century. David Ludden’s *Peasant History in South India* (1985), analyses how irrigation, marketing and worship came to shape the economic and cultural landscape of the Tinnevelly district, in the Madras Presidency. He bestowed more attention to agrarian conditions and the role of villages in Indian History. He focuses on the peasant as the centre of the social historiography of the agrarian civilization of South India. Particularly, he discusses the classification of land on the basis of soil and points out to migration as an important social factor which shaped the history of the Tinnevelly district. David Mosse’s *The Rule of Water Statecraft, Ecology and Collective action in South India* (2003) bestows attention on the water management and rights of the two zamindari areas, Ramnad and Sivaganga in southern India. He examines water rights or *neer urimai* and its impact on the state and social order in the two zamindaries of Ramnad and Sivaganga from nineteenth and late twentieth century. His main focus is on how tanks and the water management system intersected with the political power of the
state and social changes in southern India. David Mosse does not touch upon land ownership rights and their impact on the social order. The present research deals with land rights and its impact on the socio economic structure of the Ramnad Zamindari, especially how the transition from Poligari to Zamindari affected the peasants in a socially stratified society after the implementation of the Company’s land revenue policy.

*Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu* (1955) by K. Rajayyan explains how the poligars represented an influential institution in the polity of Tamil Nadu from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, emerged as a powerful factor under the Vijayanagar empire, flourished and struggled through until they vanished from the stage of history after the failure of the South Indian Rebellion of 1802. This work gives a clear picture about the origin of the Poligari system in a detailed manner. K. Rajayyan had focused on the relations between rebel poligars and ruling powers, the causes of the decline of the Nayaks and Poligar wars and also explained about the fall of Ramnad and Sivaganga. He explained about the British reorganization of the Poligari system. S. Thiruvenkatachari’s *The Setupatis of Ramnad* (1959) gives a chronological account of Setupathis of Ramnad from seventeenth century to first half of the twentieth century. He narrates the origin of the Maravans in a detailed manner. Thiruvakatachari’s work mainly focused to give a brief history about the history of the Setupathis from Sadaika Tevar to Raja Shanmuga Rajeswara Setupathi of Ramnad zamin. Rajayyan’s work examines the end and ruin of the Poligars of the southern Tamil country, S. Thiruvenkatachari’s work is mainly about the political history of Ramnad, whereas the present work concentrates on the social and economic history of Ramnad after the rebellion and defeat of the Poligars.
Robert Hardgrave’s *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (1969) gives the entire history of the Shanans or Nadars, in the nineteenth century. In his work he describes about the caste structure in India and discusses the conditions and traditional status of the Shanans. He brings out how the Shanans, as toddy-tappers or climbers of the Palmyra tree, considered by the so called high caste Hindus in the early nineteenth century to be among the most defiling and degraded of all castes, suffered severe social disabilities, and came to be considered as the economically depressed community in the Tamil country. Then he describes their conversion to Christianity and the changes in their status in society after their conversion to Christianity. He also highlights about the formation of associations like the Nadar Mahajana Sangam (1910) and its contribution towards progress of Shanans in the twentieth century. Hardgrave’s work focuses mainly Shanans in six towns of Ramnad district, after its formation in 1910 namely Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Tirumangalam, Sattagudi, Palayampatti and Aruppukottai. His work does not touch upon the Shanans of Kamudi, their conflict with Maravans and the causes for the rivalry between Maravans and Shanans in Ramnad Zamindari from 1803 to 1910.

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

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

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

A few journal articles focus on social conflict and caste violence in Tinnevelly district. K. A. Manikumar’s ‘Caste and Classes in South India’\(^{37}\) examines the causes


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

**Hypotheses**

The present research proceeds on the following hypotheses.

i. The introduction of permanent settlement created a new land owning group in Ramnad, attended by social and economic transformation.

ii. The Setupathis of Ramnad were stripped of their political authority and were made Zamindars, collecting land rent and revenue for the Company.

iii. Landowning rights led to the emergence of a new elite group who attempted to maintain their social status, prestige and reputation.

iv. The ownership of land, land holding rights and economic status were the major causes for the social imbalance that resulted in caste conflict in the Ramnad Zamindari.

**Chapterisation**

The present research has four chapters excluding Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction outlines the theme of the research work, its objectives, scope of the study, review of literature, hypotheses, chapterization, sources and methodology, domain formation of Ramnad and social stratification, historical and geographical background of Ramnad Zamindari. The first chapter, entitled “Colonial Rule and Ramnad: From Little Kingdom to Zamindari”, examines how the Company entered the politics of Ramnad kingdom, assuming its control from the Nawab of Arcot. It discusses the significance of the treaties of 1781 and 1792 between the Nawab and British and how from 1795 onwards the British wrested the direct control over Ramnad. Further, the revolt of the Marudu brothers in 1801 and its impact on Ramnad are described in this chapter. The political circumstances for the introduction of the permanent settlement in Ramnad by 1803 and the subsequent establishment of the absolute power of the Company are analyzed. The chapter brings out the reduced status of the Setupathis as the nominal rulers of Ramnad under the Company and their transformation from chiefs of *palayams* into zamindars without political authority. This chapter highlights the Company’s land revenue policy and administration over Ramnad from 1803 to 1910.
“Zamindari Tenure and Land Settlement in Ramnad Zamindari” is the second chapter which deals with the introduction of zamindari tenure in the Madras Presidency based on the model of the Bengal Presidency. It discusses the land revenue system tried out in the Ramnad Zamindari to get more and regular income from land, the methods of revenue collection, currency and taxation implemented after the introduction of the permanent settlement. This chapter also explains how the British land revenue policy laid the foundation for the social hierarchical order based on the wealth of a community.

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

The fourth chapter, “Economic Transformation, Religious Conversion and Social Legitimacy in Ramnad Zamindari” analyzes the social and economic transformation that took place in the Ramnad zamindari. The mismanagement of the zamindars and government officials led to the migration of the people to other states
in order to survive the burden of taxation. The officials’ over assessment of revenue and tyrannical collection of tax forced the peasant to mortgage or sell the land to money lenders or Chetties. The present chapter analyses how the Chetties or the money lending community emerged as the landowning caste in the second half of nineteenth century. Further it traces the migration to Ramnad of the Shanans who were considered as toddy tappers or *marameri* in the Tinnevelly district. When they migrated to Ramnad for trading purpose they were transformed into trading communities. How the Shanans of Ramnad emerged and established their status in the nineteenth century and their religious conversion for gaining social mobility in the nineteenth century are explained in this chapter. This chapter focuses on the social and economic transformation that took place in Ramnad due to the British land revenue policy. Conclusion brings out the findings of the research.

**Sources and Methodology**

The present research work makes an extensive use of both primary and secondary sources for understanding land, power and society in Ramnad under Colonial rule. Archival sources constitute the bulk of the primary sources, mostly British government official records, which include historical manuscripts, revenue consultancies, and Revenue reports. The *Report on the Administration of the Estate under the Court of Wards in the Madras Presidency 1890-1891* gives more details for understating the land revenue administration of Ramnad which came under the control of Court of Wards. Report of the *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Introduction to Vol III, Evidence taken in the Madras Presidency* (1928) and the *Report of the Commissioners for the investigation of alleged cases of Torture in the*
Madras Presidency, (1865) have been used extensively for studying about the problems, issues and torture faced by the peasants in Ramnad. The Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee part I & II (1938), Estate Land Act Committee Landholders’ Statement part I & II (1938), Estate Land Act Committee Memoranda submitted to the Committee, part I, II & III (1938), Estate Land Act Committee Reports from Collectors (1938) are the major sources to understand about the administration of the Madras Presidency after the introduction the permanent settlement. The Administrative Reports of the Madras Presidency is useful to know about the policies of the British. S. R. Lushington’s Report on Permanent Settlement 1802 provides to be valuable to know about the introduction of the permanent settlement in the southern Tamil country, especially in Ramnad, Sivaganga and Tinnevelly. The Madura District records, Old Records of Madura Collectorate 1836-1854, have been utilized to understand about the politics and administration of the Madura district. The Native News Paper Reports have been used to know public opinion about the administration of British rule in the Madras Presidency. The Privy Council Reports are used to study about the Ramnad Setupathis and their civil and revenue suits which were filed in the district courts and finally passed on to the London Privy Council for ultimate decision.

The fifth Report from the Select Committee on the affairs of the East India Company, Vol. I & II (1812) and Walter Kelley Firminger(ed), Affairs of the East India Company Being the Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons 28th July 1812, Vol III, were used to clarify the land revenue settlement of the southern palayams in a detailed manner. William Taylor's Oriental Historical Manuscripts Vol I & II (1835) gives the picture of history, mythology and antiquities
of southern Kingdoms. *Madras Land Revenue Reports, Revenue Consultancies, Board of Revenue Records*, Revenue documents of Ramnad were utilized for understanding the land revenue administration for the concerned period and area of study. P. Gnasundara Mudaliyar’s *Notes on Permanent Settlement* (1940) has been used for the background of the introduction of the permanent settlement in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies. The *diary of Bhaskarasami Setupathi*, which documents of pieces of concernment of Raja of Ramnad gave the information on Baskarasami Setupathi and his day to day activities and the chronological events of History of Ramnad Setupathis.

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

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

**Agricultural Landscape of Ramnad**

**Total area of Ramnad Zamindari**

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

**Soil condition of Ramnad**

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

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

\textsuperscript{41} Board of Revenue, No. 3198, dated 21.12.1882, 7.
fully covered by manal or sand. The southern part of Ramnad contains soil of karisal, veppal and sevval. The foremost western side was enclosed by karisal, veppal and vandal lands. The taluks of Pallimadam, Kamudi, Papankulam, Muthukulathur and Abiramam form the karisal lands. The soil of this part of Ramnad is not the rich kind of soil. The black soil made the western side of Ramnad. Coriander and Groundnut constituted the usual produce in the parts of Abiramam and Kamudi. Kamudi taluk consisted of karisal, manal, seval and veppal kinds of soil. The soil condition of the Pallimadam taluk was generally karisal and veppal. The north-eastern part of this taluk was covered with manal. The land pattern of the Hanumanthagudi taluk was that generally pottal land. Vandal and manal lands prevails in the coastal portion.\textsuperscript{42}

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

\textsuperscript{42} Ram Row, Ramnad Manual, 174-190; Pharoah, A Gazetteer of Southern India, 407.

\textsuperscript{43} S.M. Kamal, Setupathi Mannar Varalaru, (Ramanathapuram: Sharmila Publishers, 2003), 73.
Irrigation Sources

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

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

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

### Kinds of Crops in Ramnad Zamindari

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

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45 According to *Board of Revenue*, the total number of tanks of Ramnad Zamindari was 64, *Board of Revenue*, No. 3198, dated 21.12.1882.
cultivated in some of the villages of this estate. The Ramnad estate is a dry zone, where one can find mostly Palmyra, Tamarind and Coconut trees.\textsuperscript{47}

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

\textsuperscript{47} Ram Row, \textit{Ramnad Manual}, 16,49.