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IJMASRI, Vol. 2, issue 1, pp. 220- 224, Oct -2023

<https://doi.org/10.53633/ijmasri>

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
(IJMASRI)**

ISSN: 2582-9130

IBI IMPACT FACTOR 1.5

DOI: 10.53633/IJMASRI

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**SOCIAL CONDITIONS UNDER SETHUPATHY RULE IN RAMANATHAPURAM
ESTABLISHMENT OF MARAVA KINGDOM**

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Abstract

Ramanathapuram province was a part of the Pandia mandalam. After the Commencement of the Vijaynagar rule in Tamil country the whole Ramnad or Ramanathpuram region was under the control of vijaynagar rulers. Later Madurai Nayaks administered the area. Visvanatha Nayak ruled the Marava country through Commissioners but the administration fouled. A number of revolts occurred portugese and the Arabs established their trading centers in the coastal area of the Ramanathapuram. Portuguese converted the fisherman to Christianity. It is attested by Pope Caldwell and also by A.Ramasamy the all auther of Ramnad District Gazetteer. Thus there was confusion and chaos in the area. Hence Muthukrishnappa Nayak, wanted to establish a strong power to cope write the portuguese and the Arabs.

Introduction

Ramanathapuram province was a part of the Pandia mandalam. After the Commencement of the Vijaynagar rule in Tamil country the whole Ramnad or Ramanathpuram region was under the control of vijaynagar rulers. Later Madurai Nayaks administered the area. Visvanatha Nayak ruled the Marava country through Commissioners but the administration fouled. A number of revolts occurred portugese and the Arabs established their trading centers in the coastal area of the Ramanathapuram. Portuguese converted the fisherman to Christianity. It is attested by Pope

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Another reason for the establishment of the Marava kingdom was the safety of Pilgrims. Rameswaram goers were disturbed by the robbers and anti-Social elements. Madurai Muthukrishappa Nayak appointed Sadaikka Deva udayar Sethupathi as his agent and entrusted him to maintain law and order in Ramanathapuram region.

Sadaikka Deva was the leader of Marava community; Marava community was a militant community in Ramanthapuram area. Robbers and anti – social elements were also included in this community. According to tradition, the Maravar helped Lord Rama when he invaded Lanka to defeat Ravana. Muthukrishna Nayak appointed Sadaikka Deva as the Lord of Ramanthapuram and also the Protector of Pilgrims to Rameswaram. Thus Rameswaram necessitated the Nayaks of Madurai to create Ramanthapuram kingdom. Bogalur was the first capital of Sethupathy kingdom.

Later Kilavansethupathy constructed a palace at Ramanthapuram and created a fort. During his period, Sethupathy kingdom attained independent status from Madurai Nayaks.

His peaceful rule existed for fourteen years. He endowed Rameswaram and Thiruvadanai Temples. The English records of 1770 A.D. states that the fort was guarded by forty-four canons. The wall of the fort was 27 feet high and five feet broad. It was a stone fort.

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight (study) the socio-religious conditions under the Sethupathy rulers.

Society

The hierarchy of caste system prevailed in the society. Mostly villages were under the control of the Marava leaders. Dr. Kathirvel, a professor of Madurai Kamaraj University has listed eleven sub-castes among the Marava community itself. Sethupathy rulers belonged to Sembiya Nattu Maravar section. In the caste hierarchy, besides Brahmins and the Vellars, the Maravar were placed in the upper strata of the caste system. Then come the Yadavas, Vanniyar, Kammalar Nadar, Pallars and Parayar. Kallars and Agamudayars were the other dominant communities in Ramanthapuram. The Kallars and Maravars had many things in common in their day-to-day practices. Sometimes, Maravars and Agamudayar had marriage alliances.

Brahmins

The Brahmins got the royal patronage. The Ramanathpandara "Isaivu Muri of 1772 AD" states that the five hundred and twelve Brahmin priests worked in the Rameswaram Temple. There are a number of copperplates to ascertain the fact that Sethupathy granted lands to Brahmins. Muthuvijaya Raghunatha Sethupathy donated a "brahmadaya" village called 'Athiyuthu' to 14 Brahmin families. Sethupathys were called as Vedar Kavalan.

Chettis

They were a trading community. There were many divisions of them such as Nattukottai or Nagarathar, Manjaputtur or Ayiravaishyar, Telugu Chetty or Kommutti chetty, Devanga Chetty, and Vellalchetty Ayiravaishya Chettis were engaged in internal trade. Some people were migrated to and were known as Madurai chetti. Those who had wooden oil extracting machines (Chekku) were called as Vaniars and Vaniya chetty. Nattukattai Chettiars had internal and external trade.

Konar or Idayar

Mostly they were agriculturists with cattle rearing. There were sub-division among them like Kalkatti Idayar, Pasi Idayar, Sembol Idayar and Kallar Idayar. The Kalkatti and Pasi Idayar had the custom of wearing sixteen glass beads along with their tali. In the caste hierarchy, they occupied an elevated position since God Krishna is believed to have been brought up by them. Some section of this community owned more lands and called themselves as land lord. They had visited Malasia and other countries and earned wealth and fame.

Shanars or Nadars

This people were numerically few in number. Toddy-tapping was their main profession but also they had lands and engaged in agricultural activities. Later on they engaged in small business and now they are wholesale traders and developed themselves into the position of fixing the market prices. Edgar Thurston says that in this inscription of Raja Raja, the toddy tappers or drawers are referred to as "Ilavans." According to 'pingalani' a dictionary of the 10th and 11th century the name of toddy drawers' castes are

palaiyar, the vasar and Paduvar Chintamani Nikandua Tamil dictionary of the 16th century adds a word saundigar. It is a Sanskrit used introduced by Brahmans. From saundiyar the word sanor (or) sontror came into existence. The Thiruppullani Temple inscription says that these people were called as "santror".

This the origin of the word shanar is much disputed and it is found no were in Tamil literature in that form. In 13th century they were called as "Glavas." A Tax called "Ilaputchai" was levied for their profession by the Tamil Kings. Originally, they were Hindus, later on they converted to Christianity in this area.

Reddiars

It is an agricultural class speaking Telugu or Vadugu,. Mosly they might have migrated to this area after the coming of Nayaks of Madurai. Their language was Vadugu. They predominantly lived in Pallimadam and Kamudi areas and they cultivated cotton and dry crops rather than wet crops, they were vaishnaviates and saivas, they wonshipped variety of deities such as "thailamma, Nagarapamma, pulamma, Anarkamma, Muneeswara and desamma.

Naidus

They were called as Balijas. It is said that they were the direct descendants of the Balija or Nayak kings of Madurai Generally they were called as Naidus.

Kambalathars

They were also vadugu speaking people. They were industries and converted the waste lands to wealthy lands in the kingdom. They engaged in different kinds of rituals associated with black magic. They worshipped their ancesters by installing stones in nearby their settlements,

The Rajus

In Rajapavalayam these people are living today as wealthy industrialist. The Telugu equalent of the term Raja is Raju. The Ramnad manual refers to the rajus as the descendants of emigrants from the telugu country but who were subsequent settlers sent by the former

rulers of the Ramanathapuram country. Thurstan Edgar, says that they were the descendants of the Nayaks of Madurai and settled in and around the present Rajapalayam. They were mostly Vaishnavas. It is said that their customs and manners were similar to those of Brahmins.

Kaikolars: They were called as senguntha Mudaliyars and mostly they settled in and around paramakudi. Their profession was wearing. "Kaikol" is identified as the weapon carried by God subramanya. It was an indigenous tribe according the district gazetteer.

Pattunulkar (or) sourashtras: Silkweavers of paramakudi and Emaneswaram. Originally they settled at Ramnad by the encouragement given by Raja Baskara Sethupathy. But, due to saline water in Ramanathapuram area, their weaving degraded. Then they migrated to paramakudi, they were skillful and industrious workmen. They kept aloof from other community people of this area. Their colour and language is different. The manual of Ramanad says that they were light yellowish in colour have handsome features. They are having Brahmanial culture in some aspects. They prohibit widow marriage. They followed both vaisnavam and saivism. Their marriage customs are different even today. They have not changed their way of life even in this century. From Gujarat or surat they migrated to vijayanagar and then to Madurai and Ramanathapuram area. Today they are peaceloving people are their principles even today. Satyam, Bhavam and punniyam are their principles even today.

The scheduled castes

Pallars, parayars and chakkiliars are called as scheduled caste. Mostly they are agricultural labourers. In Ramanathapuram Gazetheer it is found that the name pallar is said to be derieved from pallam, a pit, in which they were said to be derieved from "low ground or" wet cultivation' in which the pallars are expert. They have a number of subdivisions such as Aiya, Amma, Anja Atta and Tondaman. They are endogamous in marriage. The leader of the pallar is called kudumbar.

Parayar

Agriculture, gravedigging, scavenging, were \ are the works of parayars in social hierarchy. Bishop Caldwell says, the name parayar was derieved from the word "parai". They were the drummers at marriages, funerals and village festivals.

Chakkiliar

Leather works are their profession. They might have immigrated from the Telugu area or Anthra. Their god was Maduraiveeran. In their marriages "The" Avaram plant" (cassia auriculata) occupies important place. In addition to these people, paliyars, a hilly tribe also existed is Ramanathapuram.

Muslims

In Ramanathapuram area under the sethupathy Rules Muslims were the second major community People. The Muslims were mostly of Dravidions origin but a few were descendants of pathans and moghul immigrants. The division among them were patham,seyyed,sheiks and labbais. Sayyeds were reputed to be descended from the prophet, hence they were held in high esteem. The labbais were traders and weavers. They spoke Tamil and were generally known as marakkayars or Rawthars. Keelakkarai, Devepattinam, periapattinam Mandapam, were their settlements. They also engaged in diving to chank and fisheries of the Gulf of Mannars.

Marakayars

Traders of the area, and also largely big traders with other countries such as Ceylon and the straits settlelment.

Christians

Third major community of Sethupathy kingdom. Christianity was first introduced on the west coast from relatively early times It was done by Saint Thamas, one of the disciples of the Christ. In sixteenth century, portuguese put forth much effort to bring about mass conversions. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants made sustained efforts at winning over Indians to their faith. They attracted the people by introducing education and medical facilities. During kilavan Sethupathi period, there was a struggle between missionary fr.De Britto or Arulananda samy

and Sethupathy. Brittto was murdered over the religiois issue. But christianity developed in the kingdom despite hurdles. Fr.Franesco layres, Fr.capelli Fr.James DE.Rossi (Savaria) strengthened the christianity movements in Sethupathy kingdom.

Position of women

It is like that of other parts of Tamil country. Sati was prevalent among the high class people. When kilavan Sethupathy died, all his wives committed sati. Divorce and remarriage prevailed in some communities. Caste system was rigid. Intercaste marriage was not allowed. Edgar Thursten mentions, about devadasi system. Melayur inscription refers devadasy system in Ramanathapuram region.

Dress and ornaments

The painting in Ramnad palace depict various kinds of ear, nose,neck and wrist ornaments. Armlets, girdes and auklets were used by the high class ladies the earlobes of the kallar community women were interesting. Dhoti and thundu were among the male members. Turban was used generally by the gents and particularly by the royal families.

Customs varied among different communities. Cremation and burials differed among the communities. Hindu culture of tying Tali was common among all community. Thus, Sethupathy rulers administered the kingdom impact and did welfare measures to all the above communities without any discrimination. During their rule, there was peace and progress. The legacy of their rule is still felt by the people.

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