

## **‘Sati’ in Ramnad Sethupathi’s Family**

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### **Abstract**

Rameshwaram is the one of the holylands of hindus,which is situated in Ramnad region. The territory of the Setupathis of Ramnad is also located in the same land between 9 degrees 6' and 10 degrees 6' N latitude and 77 degrees 56' and 79 degrees 19' E longitudes. It encompassed the southern and eastern portion of Madurai district and included the whole Bay of Bengal coast of the district. It has an area of 2,104 square miles (5,450 km) and had a population of 723,886 in 1901. It was one of the largest and the most populous zamindari estates in the Madras Presidency.Inthe year 2011 cences ,this district’s total population is 1,353445, with an area of 4104sq km.The term Ramnad traces its origin from the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameshwaram. Sethupathis acted as the guardian of the Isthmus (Ramasethu). So the rulers were called as Sethupathis. The system called sati was practiced in the upper class in the Indian society. The term ‘sati’ is derived from the Sanskrit word that literally means the chaste or virtuous wife.

**Key words** Sethupathi, Ramnad, Sati, Rama sethu, Brahmahathi Dosam,Mugavai.

### **RAMNAD**

The term Ramnad traces its origin from the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameshwaram. It is believed that Sri Rama carried out the construction of the Rama Sethu Bridge with the support

of his followers to cross the ocean in his conflict against Ravana, the ruler of Srilanka. There after Sri Rama consecrated a temple at Rameshwaram for the worship of Lord Siva to expiate the sin of brahmahathi dosam in slaying Ravana and left the the protection of the pilgrims and the temple under hereditary charge of the Maravar chieftains of the region. Lord Rama's faithful servant, Guha built a town near the Rama Sethu. The town was called Mugavainagaram. Then the town appears to have been very near the sea and even now it is occasionally referred to as Mugavai. This town was later known as Ramnad (or) Ramanathapuram.

Rameshwaram Island situated in between Adam's Bridge and a narrow strip of land on the mainland is a low and a sandy region dressed with scrub and stunted bushes and coconut palms. The Hindu holy island city of Rameshwaram, from where; legend has said that Sri Rama launched his invasion of Ravana's Srilanka. On the conclusion of the war and Rama's success in it, he appointed a Sethupathi or "lord of the bridge" to guard the island. The "bridge" referred to here is the legendary Adam's Bridge or Rama's Bridge which was believed to have been constructed by Sri Rama. The Maravar chieftains of Ramnad were entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the bridge, hence the appellation. Adam's Bridge is a narrow bridge of sand and rocks mostly dry which connected Manar Island with Rameshwaram Island. It is mostly composed of shifting of sand banks, with intricate channels between them. Adam's Bridge separates Ceylon from India.

## **SETHUPATHIS**

Sethupathis acted as the guardian of the Isthmus (Ramasethu). So the rulers were called as Sethupathis. Then the town The Setupathis of Ramnad who ruled over the areas of Sethunadu for a period of two centuries from 1605 to 1795 played a significant role in the socio- political, economic and cultural transactions of South India. The territorial segment of Ramnad and Sivaganga regions formed an integral part of the Madurai Nayak kingdom established by Krishna Deva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire under the command of his general Venkatappa Nayak. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Nayak rulers of Madurai officially recognized the traditional chieftain of the region who belonged to the Maravar caste as the chieftain of Ramnad; in return,

Sadaikka Thevar recognized the sovereignty of the Nayak king over his lands. When the power of the Nayak kings of Madurai began to decline in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Sethupathis' of Ramnad asserted their independence.

The kingdom of the Sethupathis' of Ramnad in the early days formed an integral part of the traditional Marava country. The Marava country included Pudukkottai and portions of the present Tiruchiappalli, Madurai and Thirunelveli districts. The Maravas who are found in large numbers in this area formed an important indigenous tribe. The numerous references to the Maravas are found in the Sangam works like *Purananuru* and *Silappadhikaram*. It is clear that from very early days they were recognised as a warrior class. The Maravas are referred to in the Sangam literature as warriors and army chiefs. They refer to them as inhabitants of the *palai* (desert, dry) land, one of the five *tinais* of land described in the Sangam literature. The Maravars who formed the chief inhabitants of the Sethupathi region and perhaps the oldest caste in the country and four or five hundred years ago they must have been by far the most numerous, as they were undoubtedly the most powerful of all the castes in the Pandya country. History shows clearly that the kings of Ramnad in the seventeenth century held a very respectable position amongst the sovereigns of the south.

## SATI

The system called sati was practiced in the upper class in the Indian society. The term 'sati' is derived from the Sanskrit word that literally means the chaste or virtuous wife. Practically it stands as a custom of a wife burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Many ancient people buried or burnt a man's widows, horses and other cherished possessions with his corpse, in order that he might have all that he loved and needed in the other world. This system was widely accepted and practised for two reasons. The wives always preferred to die before the death of their husbands and when their husband died during their life time they would commit sati. A reason for this could be that widows were not able to tolerate the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the society.

**SETHUPATHIS IN RAMNAD**

Muthukrishnappa Nayak became instrumental in restoring the Marava territory to the ancient line of Sethupathi in 1605. He is credited with the foundation of the dynasty of the Sethupathi of Ramnad. They were given the Marava country on condition that they should suppress crime and protect the pilgrims going to Rameshwaram from the burglars and bandits of that wild and inhospitable region. They had their own tribal leaders under whom they served as kings. By virtue of their military prowess they became turbulent and powerful. The Marava chieftains were absorbed in to the prevailing feudal structure. They were given land rights with the condition of wartime contributions. They were noted for their military powers. They lived by serving as soldiers in the army and at times by plunder. Sethupathis and extended protection to the pilgrims who visited Rameshwaram. Apart from giving protection two Sethupathis did religious services to the Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameshwaram.

The Sethupathis of Ramnad who ruled over the areas of Sethunadu for a period of two centuries from 1605 to 1795 played a significant role in the socio-political, economic and cultural transactions of South India. The territorial segment of Ramnad and Sivaganga regions formed an integral part of the Madurai Nayak kingdom established by Krishna Deva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire under the command of his general Venkatappa Nayak. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Nayak rulers of Madurai officially recognized the traditional chieftain of the region who belonged to the Maravar caste as the chieftain of Ramnad; in return, Sadaikka Thevar recognized the sovereignty of the Nayak king over his lands.

When the power of the Nayak kings of Madurai began to decline in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Sethupathis' of Ramnad asserted their independence. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Raghunatha KilavanSethupathi crowned himself the king of Ramnad and

shifted his seat from Pogalur to Ramnad close to the east coast. He erected massive fortifications to protect his capital. In 1725, the king of Thanjavur claimed the northern part of the Ramnad kingdom up to the river Pambar in return for his services during the civil war in Ramnad. A vassal of Ramnad who was amongst the victors in the civil war took over the westerly located Sivaganga region, thereby leaving only three-fifths of the kingdom actually in the hands of the king of Ramnad.

## SETHUPATHI'S FAMILY INVOLVED SATI

18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century most of the people in the states Rajasthan and Bengal practiced 'sati'. At the same time British East India company recorded that the total figure of know accurrences for the period 1813-1828 was 8135. 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sethupathi region also had witnessed many cases of 'sati'. One of the Sethupathi ruler Kilavan Sethupathi died in 1710, his forty seven wives committed sati along with him. Next ruler Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1710-1725) two daughters are Seeni Nachiyar and Laxmi Nachiyar.

Seeni Nachiyar and Laxmi Nachiyar married Dhanda Thevar. Dhanda Thevar was died in 1720 his two wives committed sati along with funeral pyre of Dhanda Thevar. Later on Sethupathi ruler memories of Seeni Nachiyar and Laxmi Nachiyar build two choultries. This choultries called as Akkamadam and Thangachimadam. Today Akkamadam and Thangachimadam villages are situated near Rameshwaram.

## CONCLUSION

From 1812 on the wards, reformers like Raja Ram mohan Roy started fierce campaign against the sati practice. Raja Rammohan Roy was personally hurt by this practice as his own sister-in-law was forced to comit sati. Due to fierce campaign and lobbying of Raja Rammohan Roy and others, sati practice was formally banned in all the lands under Bengal presidency by



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