

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF ETTAYAPURAM : A STUDY

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Abstract: *An attempt has been made to bring out the significance of Ettayapuram is an interesting topic which focuses on history of Zamins and their contribution to Art and letters and they ruled independently. India was under the clutch of the British rule for about two centuries. It has been pointed out by great historians, the mutual disunity that prevailed among the native rulers in India, was the main reason for the slavery of the Indian soil. However a galaxy of thinkers, writers, poets, philosophers and others who had national liberation only as their heart throbs, joined together and vowed to overthrow the British rule from India. The services of a few native rulers and chieftains who raised the banner of liberation, opposing the British rule in India is noteworthy.*

Key Words: *Cultural contribution of Zamins, Pitha Maharaja, Contribution to culture and Art, and Men of Letters, Patrons of men of letters.*

1. Introduction:

An attempt has been made to bring out the significance of Ettayapuram is an interesting topic which focuses on history of Zamins and their contribution to Art and letters and they ruled independently. India was under the clutch of the British rule for about two centuries. It has been pointed out by great historians, the mutual disunity that prevailed among the native rulers in India, was the main reason for the slavery of the Indian soil. However a galaxy of thinkers, writers, poets, philosophers and others who had national liberation only as their heart throbs, joined together and vowed to overthrow the British rule from India. The services of a few native rulers and chieftains who raised the banner of liberation, opposing the British rule in India is noteworthy.

Ettayapuram is a place of historic importance and an asylum for men of letters such as poet Subramania Bharathi, Great Musicians like Muthusamy Dikshithar, Subrama Dikshithar, Kadigai Muthu Pulavar and Umaru Pulavar, they are attracted the attention of people of India not only that but the foreigner also.

Ettu +Ayah+Puram (Ettu =Eight, Ayah = father, Puram= the place which had the guardian) is place which had the guardianship of the father of eight brothers. Eight- the number is the revered one stands for rulers – zeminders – poligars- Rajas- that is Ettappan the name itself having the significant meaning which shows the greatness of the person. The title was given by the ruler of Royal vellore, hereditarily to the Ettappan family for their generosity and gracious heart even to the enemies.¹ Another title conferred to them by the Madurai rulers- Ettaya-Meaning Ettu (eight) Aiyan (a great warrior who lost his life in an encounter with the enemies.)

The people of Ettayapuram highly respect their rulers. In their practical life, they are not daring to pronounce the numeral. The number eight has great respect in their mind. Whenever they happened to count the number eight, they use to substitute it with the word ‘Maharaja’. In business if they measure the paddy they count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7, then they say ‘Maharaja’ then they continue to count 9,10,11 and onwards. Likewise they follow the same method in the counting of other objects also.²

Ettayapuram was established in 1567 A.D. in the month of January by Jagavira RamaKumara Ettappan Nayakar, the son of Jaga Vira Rama ketchila Ettappa Nayakar.³ Tamil had its growth in the reign of Chera-Chola- Pandias. The Zamindars of Ettayapuram also extended their helping hands to the growth of the language. Prose, Poetry and Drama, the three divisions of the Tamil Language were encouraged by them. They encouraged the growth of arts like Sculpture, drawing and Architecture. Zamindars were talented in many languages. They were excellent in music. They played the musical instruments very well. They were interested very much in the art of drama. They were talented in drawing also. Their palace is adorned like an art gallery. Experts in fine arts were honoured in their courts.

Ettayapuram is a historic place lying very much in the Thoothukudi district of Tamilnadu. It is about 15 kilometres on the east of Kovilpatti, a famous textile city. The history of Ettayapuram is quite interesting to study. It served as a palayam, later on known as Zamin, under the British rule. As in the case of any other Zamin, Ettayapuram also experienced many political and diplomatic ups and downs in its long journey of a few centuries are revealed from

¹ Sinnakani, R,(ed) Gazetteers of India, Tamilnadu state, Thoothukudi District, Vol-I, Government of Tamilnadu, Chennai,2007, p,135.

² Sakthi Dosan Subramanian, “Mahakavi Bharathiar, (Pudhumai kkannottam),Chennai,1980, Pp,18-19.

³ Ibid, p,20.

a lullaby, the primary source which helps very much to understand the history of Ettayapuram is one 'Vamsamani Dheebigai' authored by one Samy Diskshidar. From 'Lullaby of Palace' the origin of Ettayapuram Zamin could be traced to Chandraghiri in Andra Pradesh. The lullaby mentions about their origin, caste, family goddess, religion, economic status, interests, strength and courageous activities.

2. Cultural contribution of Zamins:

The period between 1635 A.D and 1801 A.D. witnessed the rule of some seven Zamindars in Ettayapuram. This period did not register much of welfare activities for the betterment of the people. A dawn came in after the Panchalankurichy war of Kattabomman against the British.⁴ In 1800-1801 A.D. the clouds of war disappeared and entire calm prevailed in Thirunelveli Seemai. After the Panchalamkurichy war Venkateswara Ettappan became the ruler of Ettayapuram in 1816. He destroyed the earthen palaces and rebuilt them with lime mortar. He dug a tank in the north of Ettayapuram for drinking water. During his period the savant of Carnatic music Muthusamy Diskshidar came to Ettayapuram. He was patronised by the zamindar. He passed away during this Zamindar's period. He had five sons. All the five were talented in Music. They were together fondly called by the people as "Eiver Rajas" (Five Kings). The Ettayapuram court served as a seat of discussion among men of words in language and literature. Their period of reign is considered as the golden age in the history of this Zamin.⁵

Venkateswara Ettappan established Choultries for the travellers and water tank made of stone also for drinking purpose in 12 places within the Zamin. He reigned for 23 years and died in 1839. His son Rama Kumara Ettappan succeeded and reigned for 12 years. After him his younger brother Venkateswara Ettappa reigned for 6 years and thereafter his younger brother Muthusamy Pandian reined for 10 years. During the reign of these three Zamindars remarkable services were extended to the public.⁶

In 1839 Rama Kumara Ettappa Nayakar pulled down the earthen palaces. He rebuilt those using bricks and lime mortar. In the north eastern part of the palace he built the Shunmugavilasam, meant for staging dramas. He re-laid the road to Naduvirpatti. During his period, water tanks at Naduvirpatti and Puthupatti were deepened and strengthened with stone walls.⁷

He built an upper bridge across the river near Gangaikondan at a cost of Rs.6000/-. The British Government rewarded him with a grant of 25 **Cannies** of land, planted with palmyrah. A choultry with an endowment of 2 villages yielding Rs.1500/- annually was made at Vepalapatti also. This Zamindar reigned for 13 years. He had no issues. Therefore his younger brother Jegavira Kumara Rama Venkateswara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyar succeeded in 1852 A.D. he built the **Mandapam** facing the Siva temple at Ettayapuram at a cost of Rs.5000/-. He also erected the Coronation Hall and adorned it with 5 golden tombs, within the palace limit at a cost of Rs.30000/-. Likewise he erected a hall for performing **yogas** and performed the **Somayagam** for the well-being of his people, through one Swamy dikshidar at a cost of Rs.7000/-. He reigned for 6 years (1852-1858 A.D.)⁸ As he was issueless, his brother Muthusamy Jagavira Rama Ettappa Nayakar Aiyar succeeded him in 1856 (1856-1865 A.D). he reigned for 10 years.

3. Pitha Maharaja:

Jaga Vira Rama Kumara Ettappan Nayakar became Zemindar in 1868. He was fondly called as 'Pitha Maharaja' by people. During his reign a very-serious and widespread famine, which raged the whole of South India in 1876-78 affected Ettayapuram also. He adopted many liberal measures for relief by opening "Feeding houses" for the famine stricken, and by making advances to cultivators, enabled them to recommence husbandry after the famine ceased.⁹ It explains the Zamindar's action, affording substantial help in rendering assistance to the ryots, and in sinking additional wells.

Pitha Maharaja went to Travancore to study the famine relief measures followed there. He met the raja of Travancore. He was accorded a warm welcome. He visited there the "Voottupparais" in Travancore. Travancore Raja presented him a small image of Padmanathaswamy seated in silver chariot. He returned back to Ettayapuram. He took much care in the progress of agriculture. He tried to implement whatever merits he noticed during his visit of Travancore. He planned to create 64 agricultural farms adjacent to "Feeding Houses" to provide employment to able bodied persons.¹⁰ He began to merge the lands which were scattered in many villages of the Zamin. In the palaces expenses also he followed many economical measures and cut down expense. The money so saved was utilised for the

⁴ Sadhasivan,V, Essay "1816-1916 The Growth of Ettayapuram , p,1."

⁵ Ibid,p,2.

⁶ Sinnakani, R,(ed), op,cit,p,136.

⁷ Sadhasivan,V, op,cit,Pp,19-20.

⁸ Ibid,p,21.

⁹ Ganapathy Pillay,W.E, Ettayapuram – Past and Present, Palayamkottai, 1890,Pp,12-15.

¹⁰ Souter, C,A, and Krishnasamy, K,N, (ed) Madras District Gazetteer, Tinnevely District Vol-II, Government press, Madras,1934,p,277.

improvement of works. He invested them in Government saving funds. He purchased many lands for the Zamin. He formed car streets encircling Ettayapuram. With this activity the town wore an attractive look. He gifted, the approach road to Kalugumalai from Nalattinpuhur of 13 km long which he had laid at his own cost, to the Local Fund Board. He, with the approval of Government lent from his own resources, a sum of Rs.35,000/- to the Bridge at Srivaikuntam across the river Tambraparani. The modern palace buildings, with almost all comforts, added much attraction to his capital, Ettayapuram. Elementary schools were started in many villages of the Zamin. In many villages **Thinnai** schools (Pial Schools) were opened for the improvement of literacy.¹¹

4. Railway from Thoothukudi to Maniachi:

During the reign of that Zamindar Edward VII Prince of Wales of England visited India. He landed at Thoothukudi. The Zamindar welcomed him at Thoothukudi, the Prince Inaugurated the South Indian Railway Extension Services to Thoothukudi on 10th December 1875 in commemoration of his landing in India. The Zamindar of Ettayapuram travelled with him up to Kovilpatti. In Manichi Junction a warm welcome was accorded to the Prince of Wales. In this Function, Christian in large number participated in it. Rev.Caldwell the Bishop of Tirunelveli, and Rev.Dr. Seargeant played an important role in this function. In the welcome party, Caldwell presented a welcome address. Accepting an invitation from the price of Wales, Pitha Maharaja went to Delhi.¹²

The Raja stood instrumental for laying a road, connecting Ettayapuram and Vilathikulam. He established a hospital at his capital and spent Rs.1000/- annually for it's the maintenance. Also he donated generously for the American Mission Hospital at Madurai and to the Victoria Hospital at Madras. He upgraded an elementary school into a high school at Ettayapuram, which has been further upgraded into a higher secondary school. He opened a free hostel for the benefit of deserving poor students. Free milk was supplied to the poor babies at his palace. In 1906 A.D **Swadeshi Nidhi** was Collected the Zamin people donated generously for the **Swadeshi Nidhi** (a fund meant for the growth of indigenous crafts).The Raja passed away on an **Ekadesi** day in the Tamil month of **Markali** in 1915 A.D. to the people of Ettayapuram and its suburbs at the early age of 37.¹³

Thatha Maharaja (1915-1928 A.D)

Raja Maharaja had seven wives, but unfortunately had no child. Therefore after his death Venkateswara Ettapa Nayakar, otherwise called Thatha Maharaja, succeeded to the throne in 1915. He was pretty old. So he has called 'Killattu Durai' (Aged ruler). 'Thatha Maharaja' was a lover of drama. He formed a dramatic troop which was called, 'Karthikaya Nadagak company'. He arranged to train the budding drama artistes through this company.¹⁴

5. Contribution to culture and Art, and Men of Letters:

The rulers of Ettayapuram were proficient themselves in the languages of Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. They encouraged and patronised exponents and experts in these languages. The rulers were at home in prose, poetry drama, dance, Architecture and Drawing. They patronized men of letters.

5.1 Culture

Ettayapuram Zamindars were Vaishnavaites in faith. Each family had its family deity or fetish. Jakkadevi was their family deity. They celebrated annual festivals for this deity. They did not have Brahmins as counsellors in their ceremonies. They went to Gurus of their own caste for spiritual guidance. They were called **Kodangi** Nayakars. They were supposed to be expert in astrology and Demonology. These **Kodangies** acted as priest at all household functions such as weddings, funerals and other ceremonies. The **Kodangis**¹⁵ were highly venerated and they enjoyed exceptionally high privileges and reverences.

5.2 Marriage Ceremonies of Kambalatars

The marriage ceremonies of the Kambalatars are unique. The auspicious day for the marriage is fixed only by the **Kodangi**. Once the match and the auspicious day for the marriage are fixed by the **kodangi**, two separate huts-one each for the bride and the groom are normally not allowed to participate since it is a marriage of the royal family. Each hut is made of the branches and leaves of **Pungu** tree and a gunny bag is offered to the bride and grooms to seat them while the **Kodangi** marshals and addresses the assembled relatives, the price of the bride usually seven **calums** of **Cambu** and are **calipanom**. The **parisam** is offered by the groom. The **parisam** is carried in great stat under a white canopy and with the beating of a peculiar kind of musical instrument called **Urumi**, to the bride's house. The procession is met half way and the price received, when all proceed together to the bride's house where betel-nut is distributed and congratulations are exchanged. The **Kodangi** heads of the whole party to the bride's booth. Priest now receives from

¹¹ Ibid,p,278.

¹² Stuart, A,J, "Manual of the Tinnevely District in the presidency of Madras, Government press, Madras, 1879, Pp, 102.

¹³ Sinnakani, R,(ed), op,cit,p,138.

¹⁴ Sadhasivan, V, History of Ettayapuram, Kovilpatti,1976, Pp,34-43.

¹⁵ Ganapathy Pillay,W.E, op,cit, p, 98.

the bridegroom a small 'bottu' strung on a yellow thread, and a tiny circlet of gold. Entering the bride's booth the sister of the bridegroom, ties the 'bottu' round the bride's neck and attaches the circlet to her forehead, when the wedding is completed. A week's feasting follows and terminates the ceremonies.¹⁶

5. 3. Death Ceremonies of Kambalatars

The kambala widows in former days, habitually practised self-immolation and the memories of those who did so were held in high respect and veneration. Small tombs termed, "Thipanjan Koils"¹⁷ in their honour were erected on the high roads and oblations to the manner of deceased heroines were annually made before them. "Sati" was not, however compulsory. Hence if a widow lived a chaste and religious life, she was equally honoured. The ordered by fire or boiling ghee is still in vogue among the kambalatars. Both men and women are much given to the practice of magic and hold a high reputation especially for curing snake bite by mystical incantation.

5.4. Religious workship

Jakkadevi is the Chief household goddess worshipped by kambalatars. She has no temple, and is represented by no form or image, but is worshipped in an enclosure fenced by branches of the **Elandai** tree (Ziuphus jujuba).¹⁸

5.5 Patronage to men of Letters

Many consider that the Zamindars of Ettayapuram as traitors. It was true that the Ettayapuram Zamindars helped the British against Vira Pandiya Kattabomman due to circumstantial compulsion. It was in the past. But the successive rulers of this Zamin rendered remarkable service for the uplift and welfare of the people at large. Their patronage to men of letters is remarkable. Just like their counterparts at Ramnad, they too supported great Tamil scholars and musician, of both Tamil and Telugu. They were great linguists, no wonder they extended their patronage to art and literature.

6. Interest of Zamindars in Literature :

In 1816 A.D Venkateswara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyan succeeded as Zamindar. He was at home in languages like Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. He was a follower of Vaishnavism. He wrote hymns in Telugu and many poems also. During his period Baluchamy Diskshidar was the Court poet. He was the younger brother of Muthusamy Dikshidar, an exponent of Carnatic music. Muthusamy Dishidar one of the three exponents of Carnatic music, to meet his younger brother who was in the Zamin service, came to Ettayapuram in 1835. Zamindar requested him to settle at Ettayapuram. He accepted that offer and stayed there. He visited several holy places such as Kalugumalai, Tirunelveli, Tiruchendur, Kallidaikkurichy and Sabarimalai. He composed many hymns on the temples of these places. In 1835 A.D. Muthusamy Dikshidhar met with his end in Ettayapuram. He sang the hymn "**Manch Marayeham** in praise of the Zamindar in the Mega **ranjini** tune. Many scholars in Sanskrit and Tamil and giant of Carnatic music adorned his court.¹⁹

Jaya Vira Ramakumara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyan was a good poet. He was equally good in epic, drama and art. He composed songs in Sanskrit in praise of Lord Siva, Lord Vishnu and Lord Subramanian. Besides, he wrote many slogans also. Baluchamy Dikshidhar continued to be the court poet during his period also. That Zamindar reigned (1839 to 1852 A.D.) for 13 years. He had no issue. Therefore his younger brother Jagavira Rama Kumara Venkateswara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyan succeeded him in 1852 A.D. He was bestowed with a deep knowledge in Tamil. He was an expert in music too. He was praised as "**second Naradhar**" in music. During his period Subbrama Dikshidhar, the grandson of Baluchamy Dikshidar was the **Asthana Vidwan**. Subbrama Dikshidhar was an expert in music. This Zemindar reigned for 6 years.(1852-1858 A.D.) He had no son. Therefore his younger brother Muthusamy Pandian succeeded to reign. He was also good at Telugu and Carnatic music. He was an expert in writing the music notation. Subbrama Dikshidhar points out in the preface of his book, "Sangeetha Sambradhaya Priyadharshini" that he had learnt the method of music notation from this Zamindar only.²⁰

During the period this Zamindar, Swami Dikshidar wrote **Sambukhavam** a portion of **Kandapuramam** and staged it in Kalugumalai temple. In Tamil literature there are two classifications namely, 'Ulah' and 'Madal' one **Pethanan Dhalavai** combined both the classifications in his poetry named as 'Ulah Madal'. The Zamindar reigned for 10 years. The Zamindar reigned for 10 years (1858-1868 A.D.). In 1868 Jagavira Rama Kumara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyan who was fondly called by the people as '**Pitha Maharaja**' came to powers. He gained a good command over the languages of Tamil, Telugu and English. He was an expert in law. During his period the '**Asthana Vidwan**' Subbrama Dikshidar translated Mahabharatham from Telugu to Tamil. Another poet of the court, Kadigai Namasivayam wrote

¹⁶ Sinnakani, R,(ed), op.cit,p,257.

¹⁷ Ibid,p,245.

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ Gurusamy Dikshidar, S, Sri Muthusamy Dikshidar Kaingariyathil oru Sithandha Vilakkam, Ettayapuram, 1999,p,1.

²⁰ Samy Dikshidar, Vamsamani Dheebigai, Tirunelveli,1878, p,4.

“Villi Bharatham” and published it in 1880 A.D. It was a dramatic dance. Besides, two authors wrote the history of the Zamin. One sany Dikshidar wrote ‘Vamsamani Dheebigai’ in Tamil, and W.E.Ganapathy Pillay wrote, ‘Ettayapuram-Past and Present’ in English. These works depict the history of this Zamin. After a colourful reign for 22 years, this Zamindar met with his death in 1890 A.D.²¹

‘Pitha Maharaja’ had only one son. When he died, his son was hardly 12 years old. The younger was called Raja Maharaja, on his attaining majority. During his minority, the British Government at Madras took over the administration of this Zamin. One “Thatha Maharaja” the paternal uncle of the minor Zamindar, even during the rule of the Court of Wards, showed keen interest in literature and arts. It was under his patronage that the title of “Bharathi” was conferred upon Subramanian, the great nationalist poet. On his attaining the majority at his 21 years in 1899, he was given the title “Raja Maharaja and made the Zamindar of Ettayapuram by the British.”²²

7. Patrons of men of letters:

Kadigai Muthu Pulavar, Nama Sivaya Pulavar, Umaru Pulavar, the author of Seerappuranam, Subbramania Bharathiar and a host of other Tamil poets were patronized by Ettayapuram rulers. The great musicians Muthusamy Dikshidar, Subbrama Dikshidar, Ramachandra Bhagavathar, Pushapavanam Iyer, Kanchipuram Nayana Pillai, Kanjiraman Poondiya Pillai, Thatchinamoorthy Pillai, Nathaswaram Madurai Ponnusami Pillai, Sempanar KoilRamasamy Pillai, Thiruvavaduthuri Raja Rathinam Pillai, Karikirichi Arunachalam, Natesa Nayanakkarar, Bakri Nayanakkarar and Karaikkudi Veenai Sambasiva Iyer were encouraged by Ettayapuram rulers. In the field of drama too artistes like Kalyana Ramaiyer, M.R. Govindasmay Pillai, S.S. Viswanatha doss, Chinna Mahadeva Iyer, Chinnasamy Iyer, velu Nair, Anandha Narayana Iyer and Kittappa Brothers were awarded prizes by the Ettayapuram Zemin. Kuppi Viranna a great poet of Kannada drama and his troupe were felicitated by the Ettayapuram Zamin. Irrespective of languages, the Ettayapuram Zamindars identified only the talent and recognised them suitably.

In 1934 after Thangasamy Pandian, Muthu Venkateswara Ettappan succeeded to reign Ettayapuram. In this period Pandithamani Katheresan Chettiar, Vellaikkal Subbramania Pillai, R.P.Sethu Pillai and Uma Maheswaran Pillai came to Ettayapuram. Navalur Somasundara Bharathi arranged for a deep research of Tamil literature then.

8. Conclusion:

Though Ettappan the Zamindars of Ettayapuram and his descendants supported the British and they were responsible for the arrest of Kattabomman. Ettayapuram is one of chief towns of the Thoothukudi District. It rose to prominence in the 17th century as it became the capital of palayams. The palaykars encouraged the development of fine arts and their palace is a store house of many beautiful paintings and sculptures. The palace stands as testimony to the glory of 18th century Architecture in the part of the palace articles used by Zamindars like Ancient palanquin, flywhisk torch and umbrella, the symbols of bygone traditions are still preserved and kept for posterity. Thus Ettayapuram is land of Ancient and magnificent temples for Siva and Vishnu and also Dargah that remain intact exposing the marvel and glory of the Dravidian culture, art, architecture and spiritual values.

²¹ Ibid,p,7.

²² Interviewed with Parasuraman, pater Siva Temple, Ettayapuram, dated, 12/06/2019.