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## MUTHURULAPPA PILLAI – PIONEER OF MULLAI PERIYAR DAM

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### Abstract

Rameshwaram, one of the holy cities in India, is an island. Ramnad District during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D, Sethupathi Kings were appointed as leaders of 72 bailiffs.<sup>1</sup> Ramalingam Pillai, Dhamodharan Pillai, Pitchai Pillai, Velayutham Pillai, Sankaram Pillai and Muthirulappa Pillai<sup>2</sup> were the representatives of the king Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi AD (1763–1795) of all Muthirulappa Pillai is considered to be the most significant one.<sup>3</sup> He brought many social reforms to their kingdom. He is also the pioneer of stream ling the watere channel that flows from Western Ghats towards the East.<sup>4</sup>

**Keywords:** Rameshwaram, Western Ghats, Sembianattu Maravas, Thiruvudaiya Devar, Sethupathi Kings, Muthirulappa Pillai

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### Sethupathis

The "Sembianattu Maravas" who belonged to the Marava community indepent ruled Ramnad during 1601 A.D to 1795 A.D. Madurai King Muthukrishnappan appointed Raghunatha Sethupathi as a leader in order to provide safety and protection to the passengers who would go to Rameshwaram temple.<sup>5</sup> Those kings who belonged to his lineage are known as Sethupathi Kings. Thiruvudaiya Devar, one of Sethupathi Kings, (1710 – 1725) brought Vellalars, who were experts in accounts from Madurai and made them settle in Ramnad. These Vellalars later served as representatives to Sethupathi Kings.

### Muthirulappa Pillai

Muthirulappa Pillai was born in Kadaladi, a place near Karungulam in Ramnad District. His father was Sundarapandian Pillai. During the reign of Vijaya Ragunatha

Sethupathi the kingdom was divided into 8 land revenue zones which were changed as 96 of the Samathanams. Provinces each taluk had supervisor who administrated the taluks and Districts. These supervisors measured lands and classified them based on the quality of the soil.<sup>6</sup> Tax was levied based on the quality of the lands. One bailiff was made responsible for each district. These bailiffs were assisted by village munsifs<sup>7</sup> who in turn were assisted by a Thandal man, a low grade officer.<sup>8</sup> He created two treasuries – Dharmamagamai fund and another fund Charity fund which provided financial support to temples, Choultries, Mutts and poets who were provided paddy.<sup>9</sup> The former (Charity fund) provided financial support to temples, Vedic Schools, Orphans, Poor and needy people. Poets like Chakkaraiyulavar, Vairavanadha Kavirayar, Masilamanipulavar, etc., were provided funds.<sup>10</sup> Muthuirulappa Pillai planned to convert the infertile Sethunad into a fertile land. He drafted a scheme which would make the land fertile. He planned to link water from Periyar with the Vaigai river in the east. And he gave it to the King.<sup>11</sup> A twelve member committee headed by Muthuirulappa Pillai stationed themselves in the western ghats, destroyed forests and selected the location to construct dam.<sup>12</sup>

The proposal was also brought to the notice of the Britishers as Muthuirulappa Pillai was an influential leader then during 1789. But this proposal and the plan to construct the dam was dropped due to lack of funds.<sup>13</sup> Lakes in 1807, George Parish ordered James Galdwell, the district engineer to visit the site. In 1808 Galdwell gave a notice that it could not be put into practices.<sup>14</sup> In 1837 labourers who were employed to divert the mud dam were affected by fever. Major Nives on 1867 submitted a proposal worth 17.50 lakhs. Stating that his main objective was to divert water towards the east. Smith made a proposal which envisaged the construction of Dam in Mullaiperiyar and diverting water towards east. As the chief engineer Waller refused this proposal, and in 1876 chennai province was severely affected by famine, this plan was further delayed. In 1882, this proposal was accepted by the Britishers and Major John Pennicuick was given charge for constructing the dam. He submitted a budget for expenditure in 1884 and it was accepted by the higher officials.<sup>15</sup> In 1887 during the month of September, the construction of dam began. The British army under the service and headed by John Pennicuick began constructing the dam.

Amidst many hardships like wild animals, severe rain and sudden flash floods, when the dam was half constructed was completely damaged due to floods. Later the British government refused to allot funds to construct the dam. But Pennicuick sold all his property in England and returned to India and constructed the dam at his own cost.<sup>16</sup> Thus the dam saw its completion by Pennicuick.

## Conclusion

In 18<sup>th</sup> century the utmost desiccated region Ramnad was changed into plenteous region which was the effort of Sethupathi's Cheif minister Muthuirulappa Pillai. He planned the dam Mullaiperiyar. Now Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram districts are benefited because of this dam which was successfully built by Pennicuick whether I delivered this Article.

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5. Rober Swell, "Asketch of the Dynasties of South India", p.89.
6. Ramaswami. A., Ramanathapuram District Gazetteer, Madras, 1972, P.889.
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