

## *Sacred Landscape: Memory and Re-Appropriating Historicity through Political Discourses*

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### ABSTRACT

Recent Scholarship has noted the importance of understanding the relations between identity, memory, and landscape of people in the past. This paper attempts to apply this approach to a pan-Hindu sacred center in India which although located in the periphery, not in a detrimental sense but in terms of geography, may remain quiescent in one historical epoch but was demarcated by certain rejuvenating aspects which help regain its religious significance under altered historical and political contingencies. The antiquity of the sacred center with its sacred landscape formed the basis of its memory and it is imperative to take into cognizance the dynamic role of historical memory in reappropriating the past of a sacred center and its implications in the formulation and articulation of state ideologies, religious practices like rituals, festivals, endowments to temple deity which can be vividly gleaned through the lens of historical sources.

In order to closely observe landscape and gather historical data, field visits were made to the concerned sacred Centre. Inscriptional evidence was also tapped, which reinforces the connection between temple building and patrons. Therefore focus would also be on deity/temple-patron relationship to highlight the changing fortunes of the sacred center. Even while maintaining its peripherality, it established connections, allegiances with mainland dynastic centers and neighboring external states. Religion also plays an important role in shaping the social and cultural identity of patrons. An analysis is also made of the methods deployed by the main protagonist of the sacred center who was successful in constructing narratives about themselves within their particular episteme through retrieving their historical past/memory so as to negotiate power with respect to large and more powerful overlords

### SACRED LANDSCAPE AND ITS PATRONAGE

Recent scholarship has noted the importance of understanding the relations between identity, memory, and landscape of people in the past. The idea of landscape both modifies ideas about places and community and may be called on to support and enrich them.<sup>1</sup> They, therefore, emerge as sites of memory.

Memories are shaped by the context in which they are formed and later remembered. They serve as a useful tool in the formation of identities as they are inextricably linked to the past. Another issue related to identity formation is the concept of self and other. The notion

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Landscape, Memory and History* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 4.

of self is constructed to project our own uniqueness. We construct and re-construct a self to meet the need of situation we encounter and do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future.<sup>2</sup>

The current paper, therefore, aims to utilize the above theoretical framework to understand landscapes as spaces where the aspiration of an individual or collective identity is realized, which are contingent and dependent on memories and its articulation.

Sacred landscape, in the context of Hinduism, is often characterized by a central shrine or temple with presiding deity and cluster of small shrines around it. The sacred landscape under this study pertains to the temple town of Rameshwaram, a pan Hindu sacred center whose antiquity and ancient religious texts establish sanctity.

The landscape carries with them ingrained sacrality, which can be proven through the medium of past textualized in the form of myths and history. Myths are potent vehicles for transmitting historically rooted events, and they carry an enormous amount of cultural memory.<sup>3</sup>

Myths also function in a particular society as support and justification for all types of social mores, cultural values, and even religious beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

The popular legend associated with Rameshwaram is that Vishnu (Hindu God in the human form of Rama) first set up Siva's (another Hindu God) lingam (aniconic representation of the Hindu deity Siva) to free himself from Bramhmahatya (killing of Ravana). Rameshwaram is both a Siva sthala and tirtha sthala. A tirtha is a crossing place or ford where one may cross over to the far shore of a river.<sup>5</sup> In India tirtha is associated with those crossing places which are places of pilgrimages and which brings the tradition of Gods and Goddesses,

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<sup>2</sup> Jerome Bruner, "Self Making Narratives," in *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self*, ed. Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2003), 210.

<sup>3</sup> Jeantte Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 12.

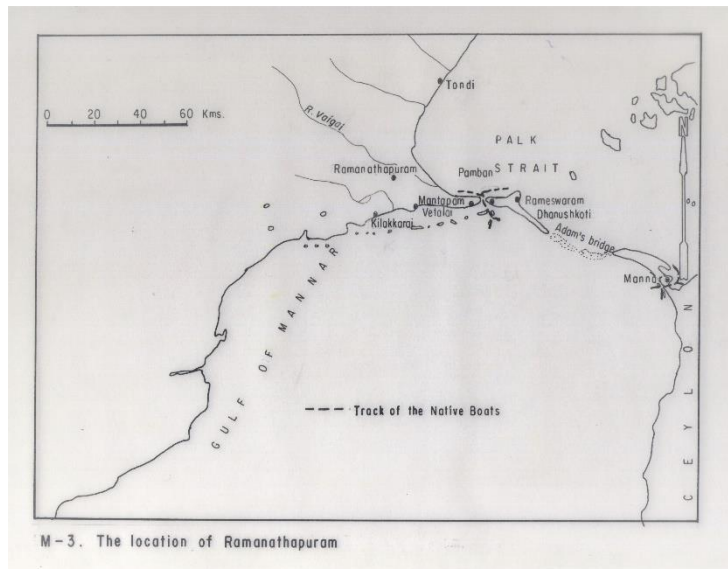
<sup>4</sup> Hermann Tull, "Myth," in *Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and methods*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2008), 256.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Eck, "India's Tirthas: Crossings in Sacred Geography," *History of Religion*, 20 (1981): 323- 344.

sages and heroes to the living embodiment in India's geography.<sup>6</sup> It is at a confluence of oceans, the water of the Bay of Bengal flow into those of the Indian Ocean here.

Therefore, Rameshwaram resonates with legends of Rama and the presence of holy lingam makes it even more sacred. The Vedas, Epics, Puranas, Smritis gives repeated references to Rameshwaram and Setu (bridge), which was constructed to cross the ocean to reach Lanka where the demon Ravana resided.<sup>7</sup> All landscapes are geographically defined. It is imperative to examine the locational and structural description of the temple town. The island of Rameshwaram lies in the southeast extremity of the Ramanathapuram (Ramand) district of Tamil Nadu. It narrows down towards the east and juts into the sea between the Gulf of Mannar on South and Palk Bay on the north, terminating in the island of Rameshwaram, which is separated from the mainland by Pamban passage.

The Gulf of Mannar is a chain of shoal called Adam's bridge. It connects the Jaffna peninsula in Sri Lanka and Rameshwaram. The map provides the location of Rameshwaram.



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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> For details refer J.L. Sastri, ed, Narada Purana Part V (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidas, 1981), 2036-37, J.L. Sastri, ed, Bhagvata Purana Part IV (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1978)1749,G.P.Bhatt ed., *Padma Purana*, Part IX (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas,1991), 3239, G.P. Bhatt ed., *Skanda Purana*, Part V, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1995)17, J.L. Sastri, Linga Purana Part II (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973) 643, Matsyamaha Purana V., Translated by Nag Sharan Singh (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1983) 902, J.L. Sastri. ed., Agnimaha Purana Part I, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1984 ),1, *Kamba Ramayana*, Translated in English by H.V. Hande (New Delhi: Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1996), 485-488, Adhyatma Ramayana, Translated in English by R.B. Nath (New Delhi: New Oriental Books 1979) 177.

The sacred landscape of Rameshwaram can be divided into sacred tirtha zone and temple zone. The temple of Ramanathaswamy was constructed, which can be considered as a single spot. The temple contains the Ramanatha shrine, and there are numerous sacred centers around the main Ramanatha shrine. The temple zone of Ramanathaswamy temple consists of 22 tithes (water resources), which are mostly wells and ponds. It is believed auspicious to bathe in them before performing worship before the deities.

A significant way in which landscapes gain their meaning is through the medium of nomenclature. The names accorded to various tirthas help every spot to gain particular meaning and indicate the origins of the sacred center. The tirthas named after deities and myths from the Ramayana are called Mahalakshmi, Savitri, Gayatri, Saraswati, Setu Madhava, Kandhamadhana, to name a few.

The sacred tirtha zone consists of a sacred center that is outside the Rameshwaram island and those who are inside the Rameshwaram island. The second category includes several other sacred shrines around Rameshwaram, and most of them have myths woven around the legend of Rama and episodes that took place during the final days of the final battle between Rama and Ravana. All the tirthas outside the Ramanathaswamy temple are considered extensions of sacred territory. The tirtha's, which are scattered throughout Rameshwaram's landscape, provides a conceptual link between the temple and town.

The memories of these tirthas, which are entwined with the sacred landscape of Rameshwaram, served as a powerful source of knowledge in any historical period. The landscape memories could serve a vehicle for remembering the mythical associated events with the sacred center. The structures would help reformulate and re-construct the understandings of the landscape, even under altered historical and political conditions. [Figure 1](#) (see appendix) provides a glimpse of the Rameshwaram landscape. The town largely extends in the west direction of the West tower entrance. The portion of the bay, which is immediately in front of the eastern gate of the temple is called "Agni Tirtham." The middle image is of Lord Ramnathaswamy and his consort Goddess Parvatha Vardhini Ammam. The uniqueness of the temple is the third corridor, which is world famous and is supported by 1212 pillars. Of all the tirthas, Lakshmana tirtha is the best for a holy bath situated outside Ramnathaswamy.

The stability of the sacred landscape and its corresponding historical actors depended on the success with which it made its interconnections and allegiances not only with imperial dynastic centers but also with foreign states. The Ramanathaswamy temple was not the creation of a single age but evolved over some time as it received benefactions at various intervals. The historical South Indian dynasties like Cholas, Hoysalas, Pandyas, Vijayanagara, and Nayaks made endowments to the temple. The magnitude of patronage, however, varied from time to time. Therefore, although Rameshwaram remained in the periphery in geographical terms, its growth and survival continued.

The sacrality of landscape owed much to Ramamanathaswamy temple. Patronage of the religious institution was considered a crucial source of social prestige and political legitimation. Many efforts were made through the sacred temple to gain further enhancement in the popularity of the kingly image. Temple retained its wide catchment area in economic and cultural terms even if the political umbrella was removed or political boundary modified.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier the temple being located at the farthest limits of Tamil Nadu did not receive much attention. The patronage was largely confined to imperial temples as they provided legitimacy to the reigning power. Under Cholas king, Paratanka 1 performed tulabhara in front of Lord Ramanathaswamy in the year around 950 AD.<sup>9</sup> Parantaka ideological justification of his control over Rameshwaram expressed materially in iconography. He installed images that were significant in the epic Ramayana.<sup>10</sup> However, the increase in patronage to Ramanathaswamy temple was evident during Pandyan rule. The Pandyas ruled from Madurai, which became the political core and Rameshwaram being very close to the dynastic center certainly gained prominence. The geographical proximity to the capital Madurai helped Rameshwaram to attract endowments. Gifts of land and ghee for the pujas to the temple were the nature of donations to the temple.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Narayani Gupta, *Craftsmen and Merchants: Essays in South Indian Urbanism*(Chandigarh: Punjab University, 2003), 2.

<sup>9</sup> R. Nagaswamy, "Early Chola Bronzes in Rameswaram," in *South Indian Studies*, Vol. II, ed. R. Nagaswamy (Madras: Society for Archaeological, Historical and Epigraphical Research, 1979), 2

<sup>10</sup> (Ibid, 58).

<sup>11</sup> (*Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy* (hence after A.R.E) 1943-44, No.197. *South Indian Inscriptions* (Henceforth S.I.I), Vol. VII, No.389).

Also, when the capital shifted to the mainland under Vijayanagara rule, it continued to be a pilgrimage center, and many rulers performed Puranic rituals and ceremonies. The cult of God Rama assumed significance during Vijayanagara rule. The capital city and the status of the king were closely interwoven with Hindu values and beliefs.<sup>12</sup>The Vijayanagara rulers like Sri Sangama and Harihara continued to make donations and charities, and many sodasamahadanas were performed by Saluva Narashima.<sup>13</sup> The Tuluva rulers Krishnadevaraya and Achchuta Raya undertook various religious tours to Rameshwaram.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Rameshwaram witnessed continued patronage under the rulers of Vijayanagara.

Apart from establishing links with inner dynastic centers, Rameshwaram maintained trade contacts with the port of Mantai in Ceylon. Various epigraphical, numismatics and literary evidence show that religious connection was maintained between Rameshwaram and Jaffna (part of Ceylon) during the medieval era. The early kings of Jaffana were SegarajaSekaran and Pararajasekaran. Their emblems were a recumbent bull Nandi and Saliva symbol and the expression Setu, indicating the place of their origin Rameshwaram. SegarajaSekaran engaged the services of scribes from Rameshwaram to copy down standard works.<sup>15</sup>

The association of dynastic rulers with Rameshwaram frontier served a dual purpose. First control over Rameshwaram meant sway over the farthest stretch of the Indian sub-continent and also to keep well acquainted with the activities going around the Pamban channel, a channel significant for economic activities and prone to external threats. Secondly, royal kings could equate themselves with Lord Rama. The idea was to infest the Indian rulers with the same power which Rama possessed. Lord Rama subjugating Sri Lanka (Ceylon) symbolized victory for any dynastic king. Therefore, like Rama, the rulers of Indian sub-continent were competent enough to establish triumph over any foreign threat marching

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<sup>12</sup> Carla M. Sinopoli and K.D. Morrisin, "Dimensions of Imperial Control: The Vijayanagara Capital," *American Anthropologists* (1995), 87.

<sup>13</sup> (*Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Article X, Vol. XII, 372).

<sup>14</sup> *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Reports* T.T.D.E.R ed . Subrahmanya Shastri and Pandit V.Vijayaragavacharya, (Madras , Tirupati Tirumalai Mohant's Press, Year), 179, (A.R.E., 1943-44, No. 198).

<sup>15</sup>C.S. Navaratnam, *Tamil and Ceylon: From the Earliest Period up to the End of the Jaffna Dynasty with a Chart of Important Events up to 1900*, (Jaffna, Saiva Prakash Press, 1964), 144.

from this frontier island towards the Indian mainland. During moments of confrontation between Ceylon and the Indian subcontinent, Rameshwaram became strategically significant.

Rameshwaram came under the control of Nayakas of Madurai. Rameshwaram being close to Madurai and Tanjore received benefactions from Nayaks of Madura and Tanjore Nayaks, who had come to power after the collapse of Vijayanagara and to legitimize their rule they had to establish local ties through patronage to religious centers and temples. For the first time, inscriptions during Nayak period mention priests (Gurukkal) of Ramanathaswami temple during the rule of Virappa Nayaka and Tirumalai Nayaka.<sup>16</sup> The priestly class of Ramanathaswami temple acquires significance during Nayak rule so that their political power can be validated.

The feudatories to Nayak rulers of Madurai were the Setupatis. The Setupatis looked upon the Nayaks of Madurai as the bestowers of their legitimacy. The Setupatis were from the Marava community (Maram in Tamil meaning those who engage themselves in acts of heroism). Setupatis emerged during the transitional phase from pre-colonial to the colonial period and became the kings of Ramnad. So now, there was a need to reinforce allegiance with the sacred landscape.

### MEMORY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Memory as a critical concept, can be used in the study of Hinduism. One often finds text that treats or records the memory of these places and many times, the places themselves bear the literary inscriptions of memory.<sup>17</sup> Scholars have laid stress on the fact .....memory originates from the symbols, landscapes, and past that are shared by a given society.<sup>18</sup> Sacred landscape and its associated structures can be treated as vibrant texts, which gives us insights as to how communities and individuals relate to them over time. Therefore, the physical landscape of Rameshwaram with its constituents sacred tirthas and structures became to be symbolized as a memorial object. Landscapes emerge as a medium through which multiple histories are remembered and forgotten.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> (A.R.E 1946-47, No.24)

<sup>17</sup> Christian Lee Novetzke, "Memory" in *Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and methods*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2008), 240.

<sup>18</sup> Axel Schneider and Woolf Daniel, *The Oxford History of Historical writing since 1945*, Vol .V (USA: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Tim Winter , "Landscape in Living Memory: New Year festivals at Angor, Cambodia," in *Heritage*,



Memory work focuses on the re-interpretation and re-contextualization of memory in the service of revised understandings of an individual or collective self.<sup>20</sup> It is also addressed how and why in each society, certain versions of the past were encouraged while others were pushed to oblivion to promote innovation, secure political advantage, or creating a new group identity.<sup>21</sup>

Now the question is why the memory of the Setupatis had to be revived and the methods deployed by the Setupatis to establish themselves as a significant political force. The temple and tirthas of the sacred landscape started receiving huge endowments to articulate tangible and symbolic authority.

Setupatis were infested with dual nature of memory. The mythic origins of Setupatis describe that Lord Rama himself appointed first Setu king and they were given the title Ramanathasahayam (who were also regarded as protectors of Setu, bridge). The bridge was constructed over the sea, lying between the Indian mainland and SriLanka. In later centuries, they were feudatories to Nayakas. The rulers of Madurai had confirmed the setupati in his superior ranking status, legitimizing his claim on enhanced honors and political authority among his rivals and subordinates and consolidating his dynastic claims on certain privileges.<sup>22</sup> But during late seventeenth-century military strength, material wealth and courtly rituals of the Setupatis rapidly expanded. The Setupatis drifted from their allegiance to their sovereign and asserted independence in 1702. This process conformed with historical dynamics of status change where Setupatis no longer remained a protector to their overlords.

The myths also could serve as reference points to the Setupatis, who, in the early modern period, attempted to figure out their existence and role played by them in antiquity. This is because their immediate memories of subordination had to be corrected to establish an identity that could accord them an independent status. The need to establish themselves as overlords of Ramnad forced them to reassess their association with Rameshwaram landscape.

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*Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on Cultural Landscape*, ed. Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 134.

<sup>20</sup> Susannah Radstone “Working with Memory: An Introduction” in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (London: Berg Publishers, 2000, 12).

<sup>21</sup> Norman Yoffee, *Negotiating Past in the Past: Identity, Memory and Landscape in Archaeological Research* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Pamela G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31.



Landscape is thus a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world.<sup>23</sup>

### REAPPROPRIATING THE PAST AND CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

It is contended that even “if the landscape changes historically, it remains an important medium through which to interrogate the construction of identity and politicization of space.”<sup>24</sup> Aleida Assmann distinguishes “four formats of memory” (individual, social, political and cultural), which is an important research tool.<sup>25</sup> The best-suited format is political memory ..... anchored in signs, places, monuments, rites, which periodically reactivate individual remembrance and enhance collective participation, which is also applicable to the current study.

Memories that perpetuated both in texts and landscape helped in the formulation of state ideology, rituals, festivals and endowment to the deity of Ramanathaswamy temple. They were constructed, institutionalized for legitimization and reasserting their own identity.

The Setupatis engagement with the past was essential as to recapitulate how they visualized themselves in the past historically, politically and socially. Their past had to be foregrounded, and memories of them being the protectors of Setu had now to be validated in a changed political scenario in the seventeenth century.

After receiving royal honor and privileges from the Nayakas, the Setupatis now had the task ahead of consolidating higher ranks and status, which they achieved by building new temples and endowing older ones. There are numerous copper plate grants of Setuapti pertaining to Rameshwaram temple, which record the endowments so as to make their kingship as culturally appropriate and also indicate their growing importance.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the

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<sup>23</sup> Stewart and Strathern *Landscape, Memory and History*, 4

<sup>24</sup> Paul Claval, “Changing Conception of Heritage and Landscape,” in *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on Cultural Landscape*, ed. Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 85 .

<sup>25</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Re-Framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective forms of Constructing the Past,” in *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed by Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 42-44 .

<sup>26</sup> S. Raju Pulavar, *Setupati Cheppedukal* (Copper Plates of Setupati) Thanjavur, Tamil University Thanjavur, 1994.

Ramanathaswamy temple was an important element in the definition and specification of their kingdom.

The Setupatis rule saw more direct links between the state, temple, and landscape. Rameshwaram and their association with Ramayana characters remained a permanent configuration in their religious world view quite evident in the copper plate grants. This conformed with the textualized memories in Puranas, Vedas, Epics and also to provide linkages with the Rameshwaram landscape. They give repeated references to Rameshwaram and Setu. [Figure 2](#) (see appendix) depicts few copper plate grants of Setupatis, which record endowments to Rameshwaram temple and sacred spots around it. They are preserved at Ramnathapuram palace.

The Setupatis established political core at Ramnad while maintaining Rameshwaram as their religious base. The Setupatis strongly identified themselves with Ramanatha deity, which helped reinforced their legitimacy. A symbiotic and reciprocal relationship existed between Setupati and Ramanatha deity. The temple deity conferred royal honors on the Setupati, and the Setupati granted privileges to temple deity. The Setupati became indebted for honor (mariyati), since the deity through the instrumentality of the priests, conferred the critical markers of kingship.<sup>27</sup> A copper plate records that Setupati king received royal symbols of an umbrella, a fan, royal insignia, etc. believed to have been sent by Lord Ramanathaswamy himself.<sup>28</sup> The presiding deity was granted the privilege of distributing honors to various courtiers associated with the ritual activities generated with the Setupatis donation.<sup>29</sup> Further, the title Ramanathaswamy Sahayam (protector of Ramanatha) was now embossed in their royal insignia, which is depicted in [figure 3](#) (see appendix). They projected their image of royalty as a responsible agent for the charities of Ramanathaswamy. They also performed great puranic rituals, chief among them was the Hiranyagarbha. A setupati ruler

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<sup>27</sup> Carol Appadurai Breckenridge "From Protector to Litigant-Changing Relations Between Hindu Temples and the Raja of Ramnad," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* XIV, no. 1 (1976), 89

<sup>28</sup> S.M. Kamal, *Setupati Manner Cheppedukal* (Ramanathapuram, Sharmila Pathippakam, 1992), 151.

<sup>29</sup> Breckenridge, "From Protector to Litigant," 90.

adopted the title HiranyaKarppa Yasi.<sup>30</sup> It was meant for conferring the Kshatriya status to the ruler.

The titles proclaimed by the majority of Setupati rulers symbolize their braveness. Dayan Setupati adopted titles like Sethu Khavalam, meaning savior of the Setu dam.<sup>31</sup>

Religious endowments also helped Setupatis rise to kingship. There was a quantitative increase in the endowment of land grants and villages to Ramanathaswamy temple complex and numerous tirthas around it. Udaiyan Setupati is said to have enlarged the Rameshwaram temple and made endowments. The income received from various taxes was also donated or gifted to the temple priest.<sup>32</sup> Villages were donated to celebrate festivals on a grander scale. Rulers like Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha also gave the rights and profits gained from coral bathing to Rameshwaram temple and the income was used for Friday festival, which is even continued today when the Goddess Parvathavardini (Consort of Lord Ramanathaswamy) comes around the third corridor every Friday night in her gold palanquin.<sup>33</sup> Apart from giving endowments to the temple, Setupatis also gave instructions to the priests for the conduct of worship, utilization of income of temple and also responding to complaints made against the trust workers of the Ramanathaswamy temple. The temple was also the arena of many festivals. They were significant because, on such occasions, patrons were most publicly rewarded with temple honors. Earlier Nayaks have given them the right to conduct Navaratri festival. But as they tried to separate from Nayaka authority, they gave privileges to Sankara gurukul (priest of Ramanathaswamy Temple) for the conduct of Navaratri festival. Therefore, by giving patronage to temple processions, they could affirm themselves as leaders of the community.

The Setupatis, who started their careers with the hereditary task of protecting Rameshwaram sacred center later, had to serve as chieftains under Nayaks of Madurai. They assisted Nayaks in warfare while, in return, they were granted honorary titles, territories. To

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<sup>30</sup> Kamal, *Setupati Manner Cheppeduka*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101

<sup>32</sup> Burgess, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 70, Kamal, *Setupati Manner Cheppedukal*, 108)

<sup>33</sup> Burgess, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 60

establish independent sovereigns, Setupatis constructed narratives to negotiate power with their Nayak overlords. The proclamation to high sounding titles, the performance of rituals, conduction of festivals and endowments to Ramanatha deity were modulated to re-construct a ‘self’ with a conviction of autonomy in relation to ‘other’ powerful overlords Nayakas.

In conclusion, the case study of Rameshwaram as sacred center leads us to reinforce the notion that sacred landscape with its visible monuments and formulated textualized myths and history remain an integral part of an individual’s or collective memories. It was witnessed that under altered historical and political contingency, the Setupatis selectively promoted their memories of being the protectors of the sacred landscape, which assisted them in establishing an independent status. The enhanced status was essential to making claims to political power. It was in the realm of political discourses like eulogizing themselves with high sounding titles in inscriptions, enactment of rituals, endowments to temple deity that an attempt was made by Setupatis to construct identity in terms of ‘self’ to counter the dominance of ‘other’ Nayaka overlords under whom they served as feudatories. Sacred landscape can be visualized as an arena where the interplay between memory with its inherent functions, significance and identity formation can be realized. Sacred landscape thus needs to be interrogated beyond its sacredness and aestheticness. The perseverance of landscapes is ensured by its integral memories, which can be recapitulated to cater to a particular historical period.

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APPENDIX



West Tower Entrance



Sri Parvathavardhini & Sri Ramanathaswamy



World Famous-Third Corridor



Agni Tirtham



Lakshmana Tirtham -Outside Ramanathaswamy complex

Figure 1 Various images of Rameshwaram Landscape



Figure 2 Setupati Copper Plate Grants





*Figure 3* Setupatis proclaiming themselves as Ramanatha Sahayam as shown in the above Royal Insignia