

## History of Sri Kayaroganaswamy Temple at Nagapattinam

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### INTRODUCTION

Nagapattinam is bounded in the east by the Bay of Bengal, in the west by Thanjavur and Thiruvavur districts in the north by Cuddalore district and in the south by Palk Strait. It is a coastal region and the coastline has a number of harbours. The administrative headquarters of this district is located at Nagapattinam town, and it is spread over in an area of 4614 sq. kms.<sup>1</sup> The district of Nagapattinam has been carved out as a separate district due to trifurcation of Thanjavur district. According to this division, six taluks namely *Sirkazhi, Tharangampadi, Mayiladuthurai, Valangiman, Nagapattinam* and *Vedaranniyam* detached from its parent district (*i.e. Thanjavur*) to form this new district.<sup>2</sup>

#### Sri Kayaroganaswamy Temple:

Ptolemy, the ancient Greek geographer, mentions Nikama as a great emporium in the east coast of South India, an important seaport, strategically situated, connecting the great cities of the west and later the Arab cities on the one side, with the Krishna (Amaravati) region and the Gangetic valley skirting the Bay of Bengal, the Nicobar group of Islands (Manakkavaram), Burma, Kedah (Kadaram), Sri Vijaya (in Sumatra) and other Indonesian Islands, the Philippines and China in the east, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Nagai is described as having lagoons and being washed by the waves of the sea. It was a city of the learned, with long streets, adorned with mansions; and the port was full of ships. Various traditions have grown round this ancient coastal town. Adishesan, the king of

the Nagas who was issueless, worshipped the Lord of this temple and was blessed with a daughter. The Naga chief gave his daughter in marriage to Salisukan of the Surya dynasty and crowned him king. Hence the name of Nagai, which being a coastal town, came to be called Nagai pattinam.<sup>5</sup>

Legends mention that there lived in Vedapuram on the banks of the Yamunai a *rishi* called Karuttamar by name. He had a spiritual bent of mind. On the advice of sages, he went on a pilgrimage in the course of which he reached Nagai (Nagapattinam) and worshipped the Lord of the local temple. As a reward for his supreme devotion, the Lord absorbed the devotee into himself. Hence the name of the Lord "*Kaya-arohanar*" which became in popular parlance "*Karonar*". This is the legendary account of the origin of this name. A stone sculpture of the rishi is found on a pillar of the Mahamandapa of this temple, there is a tradition that there was a settlement of the Pasupata sect from Karohana in Gujarat. We have similar temples at Kanchi and Kumbakonam.<sup>6</sup>

The Tamil epic, *Manimekhalai*, mentions that the Chola king Killi-Valavan married a Naga princess and their offspring was Tondaiman Ilandiraiyan of the Pallava race.<sup>7</sup> Agastya was another devotee of this Lord. King Dasaratha of Ayodhya is said to have consecrated here an icon of Sani (Saturn) to rid him of his sins.

The temple of Nagaikaronam should be one of the earliest temples of Tamil land. Its Lord is sung by the Tamil hymnists Appar and Sambandar (Seventh century A.D.) and Sundarar (Early ninth century). Kayarohanesvarar (now called Karonasvamin) is extolled by the hymnists in the various aspects of Siva, such as

Ardhanarisvarar, Lingodbhavar, , Tripurantakar, Gajasura-Samharar (who wore the elephant's hide), Kalari, Kamadahanamurti, the subduer of the proud Ravana of ten heads and twenty arms, one who cut off the fifth head of Brahma, the swallower of *halahala* poison, one who dances in the cremation ground, the wearer of the garland of skulls, and polemically as the chastiser of the heretical Buddhists and Jains.<sup>8</sup> The place is one of the *Saptavitankar* shrines; the local *vitankar* is called Sundara Vitankar; it is famous for the *Taranga* form of dance. Sundarar prays before the Lord here, as usual for gold, precious stones, ornaments, pearls, silk, scents, unguents and even a horse for his wives Paravai and Sangili.

Nagapattinam was also the home of one of the 63 *Tamil Saints*, *Aripatta Nayanar*. He was a fisherman and the head of their clan. He used to fish in the sea and give away the first catch to the *Lord of Karonam*. The Lord tested the depth of his devotion one day, when he caught only one fish; even that was offered to the Lord and he submitted himself to a life of self-denial. Another day his only catch was a gold fish, and even this was thrown into the sea as an offering to Siva. At once he attained salvation.<sup>9</sup>

Nagapattinam grew in importance as a sea-port and commercial centre in the days of the Cholas. There was close contact between the Sri Vijaya kingdom in the Indonesian archipelago and the Chola empire. A *Vihara* was built at Nagapattinam for the *Buddhists*, named after the king of Kataha (Kadaram) and supported by extensive grants in the shape of land revenue from the village of *Anaimangalam* close by. There would appear to have been stationed high-level emissaries of the king of Kataha at Nagapattinam. We have seen, while dealing with Rajarajesvaram at Tanjavur, that among the more important temples which contributed temple-women (*talip-pendin*) to the metropolitan temple was that of *Tirukkaronam* or *Karonam* at *Nagai*.<sup>10</sup>

In this temple there are a number of inscriptions of Rajaraj I Rajendra I Rajaraj II and Kulottunga III. The earliest of them, found on the west wall of the central shrine below the Lingodbhavar image, is dated in the twenty-fifth year of Rajaraja Chola I and records a gift of 20 katus for supplying paddy for food offerings to the deity.<sup>11</sup> A twenty-ninth year record of Rajaraja Chola I mentions a gift of land in Palaiyur for worship and offerings to the Mahadevar of Tirukkaronam by the *urar* (the residents) of Nagapattinam in the Pattinakkurram.<sup>12</sup>

Two inscriptions belong to the third year of Rajendra I; one records a gift of a jewel set with precious stones such as *pachchai*, *Maragadam*, *manikkam* and others in various parts like Virappattam, weighing altogether 141 *kalanju's* and one *manjadi*, to the silver image of Nagaiyalagar set up in the temple called Tirukkaronam in Nagapattinam in Kshatriyasikhamani valanadu by the agent (*Kanmi*) of the king of Sri Vijaya (*srivijayattaraiyar*) whose name is lost, belonging to Menronri-pattinam in Kil-sembi nadu in Rajaraja mandalam. The record mentions the name of the engraver, who was one Eran Sadaiyan.<sup>13</sup> The other record mentions a gift of land by Mahilatti Sendan *alias* Keralantaka . . . a merchant of Nagapattinam, and the gift is mentioned as having been made tax-free by the *urar*.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently it is the same Eran Sadaiyan *alias* Devarakanda Acharyan who fashioned several types of lamps like *pavai-vilakku*, *kurakku - vilakku*, and *matta - Vilakku*, which were given as gifts to the temple by Nimalan Agastisvaran, the "agent of the king of Sri Vishayam".<sup>15</sup> It is likely that the agent in both these cases was the same person. In the second year (presumably of Rajendra Chola I), several silver utensils for use in the temple were gifted by several persons including some merchants and *Sivabrahmanas*.<sup>16</sup> In the seventh year of Rajendra Chola I, it is mentioned that two gifts were made each of 87¾ *kalanjus* of *chinakkanakam* and one of 60¾ *kalanjus* of undigaippon, for (a) jewels to god Tirukkaronamudaiyar, (b) worship and food offerings (*avi-bali*) to Andhanarigal and (c) feeding two *brahmanas* at the temple, by Kurttan Kesuvan *alias* Agralekai, the agent of Kidarattaraiyan. The donor is stated to have setup and consecrated the image of Ardhanari(gal).<sup>17</sup>

These precious gifts were made possibly at the behest of the king of Sri Vijaya ad Kadaram, Chulamanivarman, or his successor Maravijayottungan, and in token of appreciation of the extensive grants made by Rajaraja I in his twenty-first year to the Chulamani vihara *alias* Rajarajap-perumballi erected by him at Nagapattinam. An interesting fact is the mention of *chinak-kanakam* (gold from China), indicative of close political and maritime contact among the three kingdoms of China, the Cholas and Sri Vijaya and Kadaram.<sup>18</sup>

During the days of Rajadhiraja Chola I, an image of Adavallan was consecrated by Cholan-Pallavadaraiyan in the temple of Tirukkaronam udaiyar.<sup>19</sup> There is only one record of Rajendra II's period which registers some grant made for food offerings one every Sunday. The

donor of the Adavallan image during the days of Rajadhiraja I is mentioned this Rajendrasolap Pallavaraiyan.<sup>20</sup> There are no records of the other Middle and Later Cholas till we come to the region of Rajaraja Chola II. Found on the tiers of the *Mahamandapa* is an inscriptions dated in his tenth year which records a gift of 83 *kasus* for a perpetual lamps to god Tirukkaronamudaiyur at Nagapattinam (*alias* Solakulavalli-pattinam in Pattinak-kurram in Geyamanikka valanadu) by members of agambadi niyayangal such as *vettikkarar*, *agambadi*, *anukkavil* and others.<sup>21</sup> His successor has two inscriptions dated in his fifth and tenth years, respectively; the fifty year record registers an agreement between the *sivabrahmanas* of the temple and Ponnambalakkuttan Nadudaiyan, headman of Vallam in Palaiya Vallam in Tiruvarurkurram, in respect of a perpetual lamp for which the latter deposited 85 *kasus* with the former.<sup>22</sup> The next record of Rajadhiraja II, is about the gift of 30 *kasus* for burning a lamp before and Dakshinamurti Devar “who was pleased to be seated in the stone temple” of Tiruchirrambalam Udaiyan, by a merchant at Kollapuram (Modern Kolhapur).<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, the shrine for Thyagaraja came into existence in the years following the accession of Kulottunga III to the Chola throne; we find a fourth year record of Tribhuvanachakravartigal Virajrajendra<sup>24</sup> (Kulottunga III) which makes interesting reading in this context. The transaction is recorded of a sale of land at Nelvayal alais Kulottungasolanallur in Ala nadu belonging to Mankondan Devandan of Alattur in Lieu of 510 *kalanjus* of gold which he owed to the tannattar. Mankondan Devandan was a resident of the *lirumadaivilagam* of Kapalavani-Nayanar of Nagapattinam and originally owed 255 *kalanjus* to the tannattar of the place. The debt was not repaid for a long time and when they pressed him for the repayment, Devandan delayed it further as evidently he was not in a position to return the money. He would appear to have come by a sizeable property on the death of his elder brother, Mankondan Nayanar, out of which he paid back the dues as settled by the *tannattar* at twice the original sum (510 *kalanjus*), which he did by parting with a big chunk of the inherited land, valued at 4,79,400 *kasus*. The deed of this transaction was called “*iranakraya-pramana-isaivu-tittu*”. We get an idea of the ratio of *kasu* to *kalanjus*, viz., 4,79,400 *kasua* being equivalent to 510 *kalanjus* (*i.e.* 910 *kasu* to a *kalanju*) in this

period.<sup>25</sup> Another inscription records the sale deed relating to another piece of land belonging to Mankonda Devandan, who, on the death of his elder brother, inherited this and the piece of land mentioned above.<sup>26</sup> In the fourteenth regnal year of Kulottunga Ghola III, jewels made of gold and silver were given as gift to the deities of Tirukkaronam Udaiyar and Alaga- vitanka-perumal by Malai- mel -amarndinar *alias* Vanavan Villupparaiyan of Marudamangalam.<sup>27</sup>

We have every reason to conclude that this temple at Nagapattinam was re-built in the early years of Rajaraja I and that it received considerable attention from the representatives of the king of Sri Vijaya and Kadaram in the years following the issue of the Larger Leyden Grant, which placed the village of Anaiman-galam at the disposal of the Buddhist *vihara* named after that king. Evidently Nagapattinam was an important port of call for the tradesmen from that kingdom and the *vihara* would have catered to their religious needs. In view of its commercial and military importance we get such names as *Senamukham* (cantonment) and *Madigai Ariyachchalai*, and terms like *Agambadi*, *Terinda-villt Agambadi-anukka-vill*, *Rajarajan-velaikkarar*, *Senapatigal*, and *Danda-nayakam*, all military terms describing various units, regiments and commanders.<sup>28</sup>

Negapatam formerly seems to have been an important Buddhist or rather Jaina centre. According to the inscriptions, it is seen that two Buddhist shrines flourished here about the 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. These were the *Rajarajaperumpalli* and the *Rajendrachelaperumpalli* and from these names it would appear that the Chola kings tolerated Buddhism or Jainism to a large extent in their country.<sup>29</sup> It is said that the Vaishnava Saint Tirumangai Alwar carried away a golden Buddhist figure and utilised the metal for covering the *Vimana* of Sri Ranganadha at Srirangam. About the 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. a king from Pegu is said to have visited this shrine. The *puđuveligopuram* or the Chinese pagoda, subsequently demolished by the Jesuit Priests, might have been one of the important Buddhist shrines of the ancient days.<sup>30</sup>

According to the Leyden grant the building of this Buddhist temple was commenced by Chulamanivarman, king of Kataka (or, in Tamil, *Kidaram*), who was apparently a feudatory of the Chola king before the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Rajaraja I.<sup>31</sup> and was completed during the reign of his successor Madurantaka *alias* Rajendrachola by Maravijayottungavarman, the son of

Chulamanivarman. *Kataka*.<sup>32</sup> (in Sanskrit) or *Kidaram* (in Tamil) over which Chulamanivarman and Maravijayottungavarman ruled, appears to have denoted some portion of Lower Burma or of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, as Rajendra-Chola I, in his war against Samgramavijayo-tungavarman of Kidaram, is reported, to have despatched many ships in the stormy ocean and to have taken possession of the Nicobar (*Nakkavaram*) and Papphala (*Mappapalam*) which according to the *Mahavamsa*, is a sea-port in *Ramanna-dcsa*, the ancient name of Burma.<sup>33</sup>

This building was a four-sided tower of 3 storeys constructed of bricks, with an entrance for doorway, in the middle of each side. In 1867 it was demolished and the present St. Joseph's College built on it. One of the figures presented to the then Governor of Madras Lord Napier by the Missionaries bore an inscription having the name *Agama pandita*, which might refer to Umapativacharya *alias sakalagamapandita* of Chidamba-ram *Dikshadars* and not the name of any Buddhist monk as inferred by some.<sup>34</sup>

Negapatam was one of the earliest Portuguese settlements on the east coast. It was subsequently acquired by the Dutch and made their headquarters. There is an old Dutch cemetery in the town, containing many antique tombs, surmounted with heavy stone slabs bearing inscriptions cut in large letters in high relief and said to have been imported from Holland. Thereafter it passed into the hands of the Nawab and then the Rajah of Tanjore held it till 1778 when it passed into the hands of the English.<sup>35</sup>

Even today members of the Fisherman community was born in this place enjoy the special privilege of placing the dead body of their members at the entrance of the temple and receiving flowers and holy water from the sanctum. A festival is also conducted in commemoration of the service of Sri Athipatha Nayanar every year during the month of Avani.<sup>36</sup>

Saint Sundaramurthy Swamigal, it is believed prayed to the Lord of this temple and obtained presents of valuable gold jewels etc. from Lord Thyagarajar. Saint Pundariha, it is said, entreated the Lord to give him 'Moksha' with his mortal body and it was granted. Because of this (Arohanam with *kayam*) the deity of this temple came to be known as Kayarohanaswamy.

The temple is under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (Administration) Department and an Executive officer appointed by them is managing

the affairs of the temple.

### Conclusion:

This is one of the important temples of Nagapattinam Town, popularly known as Neelayadakshiamman Temple or in short, Amman temple. It is centrally situated in the Port Town of Nagapattinam. This temple of antiquity is the eighty-second sthalam among the 127 Padal Petra Sthalams located on the southern bank of the Cauvery.

The shrine belongs to the Chola period. There are two prakarams in this temple. Inside the temple is a five-tiered gopuram called Chola Gopuram said to have been constructed by one of the Chola rulers of the region. The sculptures in this temple are of the highest tradition and quality. As noteworthy as the Nagabarana Vinayaga is the majestic Nandhi, the conventional vehicle of Lord Siva in front of the Swamy sannadhi.

Among the numerous bronze and Panchaloga idols, the intricate workmanship of Panchamuga Vinayagar with five faces seated on a Lion is noteworthy. Poojas are performed six times a day. Offering prayers to the God at Arthajama Pooja is considered specially important. There is a separate endowment for this particular pooja.

There are about seven inscriptions in this temple, which reveal the following information. The *District Gazetteer* states that there are some other inscriptions also revealing the gift given by Raja Raja Chola I to build a Buddha Temple in Anaimangalam village and donations made to that temple by Kulothunga Chola. Because of this (Arohanam with *Kayam*) the deity of this temple came to be known as Kayarohanaswamy.

The temple is under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (Administration) Department and an Executive Officer appointed by them is managing the affairs of the temple.

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