

## Historical Approach to the Hindu Heritage Monuments of Nagapattinam

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The district of Nagapattinam is one of the constituents of the Cholamandalam acclaimed as the most prominent among the ancient Tamil Kingdoms. Its salient features more than anything else have contributed to the glory of the Cholamandalam. This region has been named after Kshathiriya Sigamani,<sup>1</sup> one of the titles of Raja Raja Chola. Nagapattinam was also known as 'Cholakula Vallipattinam.' The heritage of this district is found in the Burmese historical text of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. The same text also gives evidences of a Buddha Viharam constructed by the great ruler Ashoka. The district of Nagapattinam was carved out by the bifurcation of the Tanjore district in the year 1991. This district has traditionally been referred to as East Tanjore and Paddy granary of South India. The Nagapattinam District lies on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. This is a peninsular delta district surrounded by Bay of Bengal on the East, Palk Straight on the South and land on the West and Northern side. It is predominantly, a coastal district having a large coast line and the entire district is having an area of 2715.83 square kilometres. The maximum temperature of this district is 32 degree centigrade and the

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minimum temperature is 24.60 degree centigrade.<sup>2</sup> An attempt is made in this paper to trace the history of Nagapattinam in a detailed and critical way.

The Archaeological terminology of the Iron Age and Sangam Age was more or less parallel to each other. Hence during this period people started to settle in a permanent area and the people of the Iron Age culture practiced many burial customs for the dead. Nagai area witnessed the urn burial custom which is a coastal region. A number of stone burials were found in and around Nagapattinam. Those are as follows: Doleman, Stone Circle, Menhir, Cairncircle, Cairn Package, Cist Burial and Dolmenoid cist.

The Sangam Literature amply refers to this district, while mentioning about the seaport of the Sangam Cholas, The famous Kaveripoompattinam or Poompuhar, the celebrated port town and the secondary capital of the Early Cholas of the Sangam period, now an insignificant fisherman's village, is located on the eastern coast where the river Kaveri joins the sea which lies now in the Nagapattinam district. The Tamil Classics of the Sangam period and the post sangam literature have vividly eulogized the city as Pattinam with several quarters of various communities. Pattinappalai, one of the works of 2nd century A.D., gives a detailed account of the maritime trade and goods which were imported and exported through this seaport. Many foreign coins were collected by Archaeologists in this site.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that the fivefold physiographical division (tinai) during the Sangam period reflects the distinctive modes of the behavior of the respective division in those days. It affects the political social and economic conditions of the people.

Hence, this district too came under tinai Concept. The Nagapattinam district in general came under Marutham division. The district is fertile low lying plains where the paddy fields are abundantly available. The adjoining area towards the east of Mayiladuthurai is the Neydal region i.e. the coastal or littoral tract stretching along the coast line. This includes the present Tanjore and Nagapattinam district. Further the region under study was generally referred to as Chola Nadu or Chola Mandalam which was bounded by the river Vellaru in the north and the south and the Bay of Bengal in the east. One Buddhist bronze was discovered with pedestal and praba 73 cm from Nanyakkara Street, Nagapattinam in 1934.

Many Sangam Age places were located in this district. Kaveripoompattinam (Poompuhar) served as the secondary capital of the Uraiyur Cholas; A permanent administration was established in this city by a Chola ruler. It continued as the port city of the cholas till 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The twin epics Silappadigaram and Manimegalai of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. also narrate the stories related to this district.

It had close connection with the great countries like west, Philippines, Indonesian Islands, Kedah, Burma, and the Nicobar group of Islands in the Bay of Bengal, Arabi an countries, and China in the east. The people of Nikama had been connecting themselves

with the world by this sea fort. Tanjore district is famous for the temples. The temples of Tanjore were highly celebrated in the Devaram. The hymns were also praise the worthy of Nagapattinam. The historians propose that there are 127 temples in Tanjore region. Among them Tiru-Nagai-Karonam is located near to the Nagai railway station that is on the Tanjavur-Nagore branch line of the Southern Railway.

Nagai was famous for its lagoons and it had been drowned in the sea because of the tremendous raise of the sea level. The city of the Nagai stood majestically with high building structure, long streets. The fort of Nagai always appeared with the ships and mansion for the guests and the traders. It is said that the city of Nagai was the place to produce the various cultures and the customs. It is considered to be an ancient coastal town.

Adisesan is the main deity of this temple. He is named as the king of the Nagas. He is blessing his devotees with his daughter. He gave his daughters hand in marriage to Salisukan. Later, He was made to be the king of the Surya dynasty. The town name emerged from Adisesan (Nagai). The name Nagai turned to be Nagai-Pattinam. A rishi named Karuttammar had been living in Vedapuram on the banks of the Yamunai. He visited Nagai-pattinam and worshipped the lord of the Nagas by the advice given by the sages of the place. He was deeply meditated towards the lord of the Nagas. The lord admired of his devotion towards him and he admitted him to be part of his soul. Then, he was named as “Karonar”.

A stone sculpture of the rishi was found in the temple. It was placed on the pillar of the mahamandapa. The similar traditions have been followed in the temples of the Pasupata sect from Karohana in Gujarat and the temples in Kanchi and Kumbakonam. The great Tamil epic named, *Manimegallai* stated that the Chola King called Killi-Valavan was married a Naga princess. Further, it mentioned that their offspring was Tondaiman Ilandiraiyan of the Pallava race.

Agastya was one of the famous devotees of Nagai. The King Dasaratha had visited Nagai and made a statue for Sani to get rid of his sins. The temple called Nagaikaronam was one of the earliest temples in Tamilnadu. Lord of Nagai temple was sung by the great Tamil classical hymn singers like Appar and Sambandar. The temple was called as Kayarohaneswarar had extolled by the various classical hymn singers from the aspect of Shiva. Those are as follows: Kamadahanamurti, Kalari, Gajasura-Samharar, Tripurantakar, Lingodbhavar, and Ardhanarishvarar. Lord Shiva cut down one of the heads of lord Bhrama. He swallowed the poison called aalahala and for the consequences of consuming the poison his throat turned blue. He always danced in the cremation ground with the garlands of the skulls.

The Tamil saints like Aripatta Nayanar lived in Nagapattinam not only that but also it is proved that Nagapattinam functioned as the home land to nearly sixty three saints. Aripatta was a fisherman and was the leader of this land. When he was fishing, he used to offer the first fish to lord Karonam. One day God wanted to test his devotion. So, he gave only one fish to him on a particular day. He never stumbled even at that situation

and he open heartily offered that one fish to the God. God was so happy with his devotion towards Him but he never stopped the drama on him and next day God made him to catch a golden fish to tempt him but the negative thoughts not raised in his heart. He offered the golden fish to the God. He was mesmerized by the actions of him and gave a way to attain the salvation.

Nagapattinam became the main place for the commercial centre and a sea-port during the region of the Cholas. The Chola kingdom had the close contact with Indonesia. It was revealed by Sri Vijaya kingdom's inscription. A Vihara was built for the Buddhists at Nagapattinam. Many women had been transported to the metropolitan temple like Tirukkaronam or Karonam for doing the spiritual things to the God in Nagapattinam. Inscriptions of Rajaraja I, Rajendra II and Kulottunga I found in Kayaroganaswamy temple. One of the oldest inscriptions found on the west side wall of the central shrine below Lingodbhavar's image. It was made during 25<sup>th</sup> regnal under the order of Raja raja I, bore the details of a gift that was given to the deity. A gift of 20 Kasus had given to the deity by Raja raja I. Further, Raja raja I gifted a land for worshipping the Mahadevar of Thirukkaronam by the urar of Nagapattinam in Pattinakurram.<sup>4</sup>

Rajendra I had gifted a lot to the deity. It was mentioned in two inscriptions that he had gifted a jewel set with embedding precious stones like manikkam, maragadam, pachchai etc not only that but also it contained the precious things like paruttikural, vattappu, makaram etc. The weight of the jewel was 14  $\frac{3}{4}$  kalanjus and one manjadi. A silver set also offered to the temple. The name Eran Sadaiyan was found in the inscription

and it was confirmed by the archeologists that he had offered a lot of gifts to the temple.<sup>5</sup> He was a famous merchant in Nagapattinam. The gift that was mentioned by him stated as a tax-free by the urar.<sup>6</sup>

Eran Sadaiyan had also gifted several types of lamps like matta-vilakku, kurakku-vilakku and pavai-vilakku to the temple. Nimalan Agastisvaran also gifted several things to the temple through his agents.<sup>7</sup> Rajendra offered two gifts to the temple in the seventh year of this reign. It contained  $87 \frac{3}{4}$  kalanjus of chinakkanakam and  $60 \frac{3}{4}$  kalanjus of undigaippon. The jewels were gifted to the God named Tirukaronamudaiyar. The rice offered to the God named as ardhanarigal. They had the tradition to offer the food to at least two Bhramins. The donor stated to have set up and consecrated the image of Ardhanari in the same temple.<sup>8</sup>

Many precious gifts were offered by the king of Sri Vijaya and Kadaram. Chulamanivarman and his successor Maravijayottungavarman wanted to appreciate for the gifts that were given to Rajendra I. Hence, they recorded the gifts that were given to the temple in the stone inscription. The gold was received from China in the form of gift and it was also mentioned in the stone inscription. It shows that the temple was closely associated with the Cholas, Sri Vijaya, and Kadaram.

An image of Adavallam was consecrated during the region of Rajadhiraja I by Chola-Pallavaraiyan in the temple of Tirukkaaronam Udaiyar.<sup>9</sup> Rajendra II had also offered gifts in the form of food on every Sunday to the temple and it was mentioned in

Rajendra II's stone inscription. Adavalan image revealed that Rajadhiraja II had another name called Madhurakaran.<sup>10</sup> No other records were found during the middle and later Cholas period. A mahamandapa built during the reign of Rajadhiraja II and the inscription found in the mahamandapa mentioned that he gifted eighty three kasus for a perpetual lamp to the God Tirukkarranamudaiyar in Nagapattinam.<sup>11</sup>

The successor of Rajadhiraja II offered two inscriptions dated in his fifth and tenth years respectively. The agreement between Ponnambalakkuttan Nadudaiyan and Sivabharamins made for the betterment of the temple. They agreed to present 85 kasus to the temple by the agreement. Further, Rajadhiraja II had offered 30 kasus to maintain certain lamps in Dakshinamurti's shrine.

Kulottunga III had built a shrine for Thyagaraja. His fourth year record reveals the truth that Tribhuvanachakravartigal Virarajendra (Kulottunga III) offered the gifts in the form of food to the temple. The records were maintained on the sale of land at Nelvayal alais Kulottungasolanallur in Alanadu. The lands were mostly sold for 510kalanjus of gold to one. Monkondan, was a resident of the Tirumadaivilagam of Nagapattinam. It owned 255 kalanjus to the nattar of the place.

Thus, the above mentioned information clearly reveals the antiquity and history of Nagapattinam from ancient period to the Cholas of Tanjore in a detailed way. In the ancient period, it was a famous Saiva and Vaishnava centre. Only after 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D it

became a centre of Buddhism. After the destruction of Poombukar, Nagai become a famous port centre and a centre of art and culture.

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