

# RITUALS AND FESTIVALS OF KOTTAR DESIGAVINAYAGAR TEMPLE - A STUDY

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The Desigavinayagar Temple at Kottar is one of the famous temples in Kanyakumari District. The temple faces east and has two praharas. The main deity Vinayagar is named as "Maragatha Vinayagar".<sup>1</sup> As the idol of Vinayagar was originally made up of "Maragatham" and hence the name "Maragatha Vinayagar".<sup>2</sup> But at present there is only a stone statue of Vinayagar in the garbhagraga or srikovil. It is not known when this Maragatham idol of Vinayagar became a stone statue. The Vinayagar is also called "Desiga Vinayagar".<sup>3</sup> The temple is located on the western side of the village, Kottar. This temple belongs to the Chettiars of Kottar only.<sup>4</sup>

It is seen from literary sources, that the Chettiars migrated from Kaveripoompattinam to different places and a group of Chettiars came and settled at Kottar and called themselves as "Kottar Chettiars".<sup>5</sup> They are also mentioned in the list published by the Tamil Nadu Government as "Chetti".<sup>6</sup> The Chettiars migrated from Kaveripoompattinam came and settled in different parts of Kanyakumari District, are found at seven villages named Eraniel, Padmanabhapuram, Colachal, Thiruvithancode, Parakkai, Ganapathipuram and Midalam. Hence they are generally called Ezhur Chettiyar.

The Chettiars who migrated from Kaveripoompattinam and settled at Kottar worshiped Vinayagar as their family God. The temple was constructed at Kottar immediately after their arrival to this place. It is generally believed that this temple was constructed some 500 years ago.

The term 'Nayinar Desiga Vinayagar' is also named as 'Nana Desigar'. This name refers the people who engaged in trade in the east, west, south and northern parts of our country. This is proved by an inscription found at Mysore. This inscription mentions of the terms chetti and 'chettiputhirar'.<sup>7</sup> A group of people belonging to this community came to Kottar where they first constructed this

temple. Their family deity was 'Nayinar Desika Vinayagar'. Reference about this is found in a folk-song, 'Yamakala Thuther Piravikathai'.<sup>8</sup>

An inscription is found in front of the temple mandapam of Desiga Vinayagar. It is dated 872 M.E (1697 A.D.). It is seen from this inscription that a Chettiyar who lived in the 'Nadutheru' in Kottar had donated a huge amount of money to this temple. From this one can easily understand that this temple was constructed about 450 years back.<sup>9</sup>

The place that was selected for the construction of this temple was done according to rules mentioned in the Agamas. In the Agamas it is mentioned that the temple should be constructed in a calm and quite lonely place and the surface of the land should also be flat and clean.

Arulmigu Nayinar Desika Vinayagar temple at Kottar is also constructed in such a place. Infront of the temple there is lot of space which gives additional beauty to the temple. This space is profusely used during festival times of this temple.

The Devaswam office of this temple is located very near to the open space infront of the temple. This office or the madam functions everyday from 10 AM to 1 PM. It is opened again at 4O'clock and closes at 8O'clock in the night.<sup>10</sup> A separate room is allotted in the office to the **Tharmakarth**a. All the records related to the temple accounts are kept in this office.

Just opposite to the Devasam office there is one Chathira Madam. This madam is used for conducting certain religious festivals on the days of Thuvathasi, Ammavasi and Pournamy. On these holy days food and puddings were served. But the same Chathra madam is used as a public library and the library is named 'Nayinar Desiga Vinayagar Library'.

There is a separate room for protecting the **Vahanams** (Chariots) of this temple. It is found infront of the temple. In this room there are only four Vahanams. They are **Perichali Vahanam**, **Kalai Vahanam**, **Chapparam** and **Pallakku**. These four chariots (Vahanams) are taken out for procession during

festival occasions of the temple. Among the four Vahanams, the first three belongs to Vinayaga, Siva-Parvathi and Nataraja Moorthy. The Pallakku is taken out for procession during the annual festival of this temple.

Very near to the 'Vahana Arai' there is an auditorium (Kalaiyaranku). This is used for conducting marriage functions of the people belonging to Chettiyars and other castes.

On the southern side of the temple, there is a tank. Those who are going to the temple will take their bath in this tank in the morning and evening and then only they enter the temple for worship. But at present there is no water in this tank and it is not used for any purpose for the last five years.

On the left side of the open space in front of the temple there is a mandapam. The length and width of the mandapam is only eight feet. This mandapam is called 'Krishna Mandapam'. Inside the Mandapam there is a picture of Krishna is found. When the Muruga of Velimalai is taken out for procession to this temple, certain ceremonies are conducted in this mandapam. Further public meetings connected with this temple are also conducted in front of this mandapam.

The street in front of the temple is inhabited by Brahmins only. But on the other four sides of the temple people belonging to different communities are living. The place where the Brahmins live faces straight to the main deity of the temple.

The whole structure of the temple is constructed by using stones only. The temple consists of two praharas namely, Ulpraharam and Velipraharam.<sup>11</sup> The term praharam means nothing but the place which is allotted to the devotees for worshipping the main deity. The worshippers come around two times in the Ulpraharam and one time only in the 'Velipraharam'.

Except the eastern Velipraharam, there is no roof found in the temple. In every prahara there is a door in order to go out of the temple. But the door of the northern prahara of the temple is always kept closed. The southern prahara is 220 feet in length and 20 feet width. The path way inside the temple is 7½ feet width.

On both sides of the path way there are coconut trees and Arali. There is one Mango tree also.

The western prahara is 120 feet in length and 15 feet width. On one side there are few coconut trees and on the other side there is only sand in which the devotees write names like 'OM' and 'Vinayaga'. At the end of this prahara there is a long pillar in which light is lit.

The length and breadth of the northern prahara is 220 feet in length and 20 feet width.<sup>12</sup> There are two ways in this prahara. But one is kept closed with red bricks. There is a Nagaraja Structure. It is worshipped by the devotees by pouring milk over it and come around three times. There is a well at the end of this prahara. The well is 40 feet in depth.<sup>13</sup> The required water for the use of this temple is taken from the well. Further there are three women statues, which are considered as Ganga, Yamuna and Kaveri.

The total length of the prahara is also named as 'Muga Mandapam' which contains 24 pillars. Pictures like 'Artha Vinayaka' in which portraits of 'Nartha Vinayagar', Vallaba Vinayagar, Thriunavukkarasan and Sivalinga are found.

On the southern side of the eastern prahara there is a statue of Pillayar which is 3½ feet in height. This Pillayar is called 'Vidalai Vinayakar'.<sup>14</sup> Those who came and worship this Vinayagar, are in the habit of breaking coconuts in front of this Vinayagar. Apart from this Vinayagar, the idols of Navagrahas are also found in this temple. There is no separate idol for Sastha. Hence an attractive picture of Sastha is kept in the temple for worship. A statue of Hanuman or Anchaneyar is also found in a small room which will be opened only at the time of puja. On all other times the room is closed after the puja is over.

The Bhuthathan Mandapam is a significant one in this temple. In it there are two big statues of Bhuthathan. Further a statue of Ravana is found in this mandapam. Like this mandapam there is earth Manadapam known as Thiruvilakku Mandapam. Every month on the day of Karthikai Natchathira, the

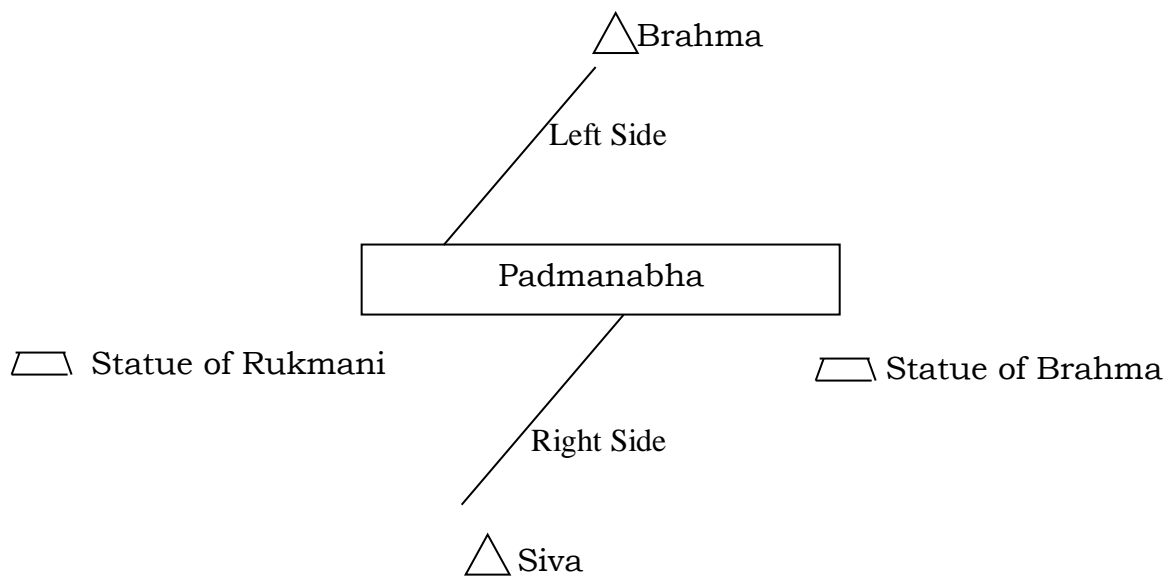
women worshippers conducted 'Thiruvilakku puja' without fail. A statue of Kannan is kept in this mandapam.

The statue found in front of the Bhuthathan Mandapam and the Thiruvilakku Mandapam are broken in nature. It is said that these statues were broken during the invasion of Mukilan in South Travancore.<sup>15</sup>

In the Southern praharas there are only three idols. They are Daskhina Moorthy, Kannimula Vinayagar and Chandikesar. The madappalli is nothing but a kitchen in which preparation of food and other items are done for conducting puja in the temple. The temple is having its own vessels made up of silver and copper. They are used for preparing different type of food like puddings and payasam.

### **KANNIMULA VINAYAGAR**

The southern corner of the temple is called 'kanni Moolai' hence the Vinayagar is known as 'Kanni Vinayagar'. This Vinayagar is six and half-feet in length and seven and half feet width. There is a mandapam in this temple which is 60" feet. in height and seven and half feet width. The devotees consider this mandapam is a holy one.<sup>16</sup> It is considered as a Thianamandapam by the devotees. On the southern Prahara, the statues of Urchavamoorthi, Padmanabhaswamy, Nagaraja and Subramaniam are found. Near Urchavamoorthy there is a secret room for protection of temple properties like Jewels. Urchavam means 'Thiruvizha'. During festivals, the vahanams are taken to procession in the streets. The Urchava Thiru Uruvankals are Vinayagar, Sivan and Parvathi. Vahanams are kept in the separate room. Different types of lamps made up of copper also found in this room. Near the secret room a statue of Padmanabha is found. Here we find a statue of Mahavishnu in Adhishesha which is Thirteen and half feet in length and six and half feet width. Statues like Shiva, Bhama and Rukmani are found in the temple.



Near Padmanabhaswamy there is a separate temple for Nagaraja. In and around Nagaraja, there are fifty small size Naga statues are found. Very near to this temple Subramania Temple is found. On one side there is Valli, another for Theivanai. There is a mandapam which is seventy feet in length and seven and half feet width which is used for conducting pujas and serving food for the devotees.<sup>17</sup>

When the people gather together to celebrate a function, we call that as "vizha". It gives happiness to them when they all join together for conducting a festival. This was the main cause for the establishment of this temple festivals. As there is no flag-staff in the temple, the Thirumurthis are taken in procession in the streets and thus the temple festival is conducted. This festivals begins in the morning and ends in the evening of the day itself. The people consider it as the temple God comes out and gives Dharsan to them.<sup>18</sup> There is no reference about Vinayaga in the Sangam literary works. The worship of Vinayaga came into existence only during the time of Pallavas.<sup>19</sup>

The worship in the Vinayaga temple is prescribed according to the norms of the Saiva Agama. The puja is performed by the priest after having purified himself by the performance of dhyanam and prayer. Puja means the worship of deity with certain presence of rituals. The pujas, rituals and festivals are conducted at the proper time in this temple.



From the very inception of this temple daily pujas and rites conducted without any break. The festivals consists of twelve to please the God Vinayaga. The twelve festivals are Vinayagar Sathurthi, Kethara Nonbu, Navarathiri Pujai, Somavaram, Thirukarthikai, Krishnastami, Aani Utthiram, Thiruvathirai, Sivarathri, Vishu, Kathiru or Nirai.<sup>20</sup>

Among these festivals the first and foremost one is the Vinayagar Sathurthi. It is conducted in the month of Avani. In connection with this festival pujas are conducted during morning and night. The morning puja is called 'Ganapathi Homam'. It is being conducted from 9 A.M to 12 Noon. At noon there is no Vazhipadu, but in the evening a procession called 'Theruvithi Ula' is conducted during night. There will be large crowd in this temple on this occasion.<sup>21</sup>

As the name implies, the day is sacred to Vinayaga or Ganapathy. It falls on the fourth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Avani. People are prohibited to see the moon on that day as it is apprehended that it would bring evil reputation, misery, diseases or other misfortunes.<sup>22</sup>

The second important festival of this temple is 'Kethara Nonbu'. It is otherwise called 'Kudanthalppu'. This festival is held in the month of Puratasi. It starts at 4.30P.M. in the evening. To attend this festival devotees from different parts of Kanyakumari District visit the temple and worship God Vinayaga. Special Pujas are conducted in connection with this festival. The devotees believe that worshipping Ganapathi or Pillaiyar on this day would be happy without any disturbance throughout their life.

One of the significant festivals of this temple is 'Navarathiri Puja'. This religious festival is being celebrated in the Tamil month of Puratasi for ten days. On all these ten days, special pujas are arranged by the temple authorities in a grand manner. The last three days being the most important.

This function is being performed from very early times and worshippers from different parts of the districts witness in large numbers on all the ten days. The devotees worship the image of Vinayagar and offer money, flowers and fruits. Regular pujas are offered in the night only. On all the ten days of the festival, every

night the temple is gorgeously decorated with garlands made of flowers arcanuts and limes and the premises are well illuminated in the night. The musicians usually sing kirthanams in praise of the God Vinayaga.<sup>23</sup> Recreations are also provided.

In the month of Karthikai a festival known as a 'Somavarum' is celebrated only every Monday in the month of Karthikai. As usual morning pujas are being held. At noon special pujas are offered to Shiva who is decorated with flower garlands and other Nivathiams consisting of coconut, betel, arcanuts, fruits and pongal. Evening at 5O'clock the temple is opened as usual and the evening puja known as "Chayaratchai" is conducted. The last Monday of the month of Karthikai is celebrated on a grand manner. On that day the three major deities ie, Vinayagar, Shiva and Parvathi are taken out in procession in the street. It is a happy occasion to the entire citizens of Kottar, especially the Chettiars of Kottar.

The final day of the Somavaram festival is followed by Thirukarthikai festival. The Karthikai astersion in the month of Karthikai is celebrated for both Subramanya and Bhagavathi.<sup>24</sup> Illumination at night is the most important thing in the celebration of the festival. This festival was famous even during Sangam Age.<sup>25</sup> On the day of this Karthikai, festival lights are lit in front of all the images of the temple especially Vinayagar, Shiva and Parvathi. The light which is lit is called 'Narayanaya Theepam'.<sup>26</sup>

Soon after the 'Thirukarthikai festival', 'Kirutinanattam' is celebrated in this temple. It also falls on the day of 'Astami' in the month of Karthikai. It is a festival for the worship of Siva. On the day of this festival the temple opens at 4.30.A.M. in the morning. Immediately after the temple is opened, 'Nirmaliya Tharisanam' will be taken place. Then begins the decoration to Lord Siva. He is offered with oil, milk, curd and panneer. Offerings such as payasam, betals, arcanut, fruits and coconut are given. The festival ends with 'Chodara Theeparathanai'.



Yet another festival of this temple is 'Thiruvathirai'. The important function on the occasion of this festival is 'Ko Poojai' which is nothing but a puja of offering to a cow. On this day of this festival a cow is brought to the temple and it is kept standing in front of the statue of Nataraja.<sup>27</sup> The cow is then worshipped with 'Theeparathanai'. On the tenth day, the 'Thiruvathirai' festival is over. The Thiruvathirai festival is followed by the popular festival called Sivarathiri which is celebrated in this temple. This is a nine days festival beginning from the first day of the bright fortnight in the month of Masi. This festival is sacred to Siva.<sup>28</sup> It is celebrated by fast and vigil. The reading of Sivapuram, the worship of Sivalingam, the repetition of the lords names, etc. form the chief observances of the vratha.

The above are the most important vratham observed by the devotees of Siva. The Upakarma and 'Gayathiri' Japam in the month of Sravana are observed by all Hindus. The important element in this festival is the offering of Tharpanam to Rishies and Pithrus.<sup>29</sup> According to the rules of the strict orthodoxy, the Gayathri has to be said every day but as it is found difficult to practice, a particular day in the year is fixed for this.

On the day of the 'Mahasivarathri' the temple door is opened throughout the day. Special pujas are performed four times a day to Mulavar, Siva, Sivakami Amma and Nadaraja Moorthi. The devotees, especially of Siva are expected by say, 'Om Namachivaya'. It is believed that if Siva is worshipped on this day will reach 'Chorkalokam' i.e., Heaven.<sup>30</sup> In the open ground in front of the temple, a pandal is temporarily put up for conducting various programmes such as dance, drama and even cinema.

The next most important festival celebrated in this temple is 'Chithirai Vishu'. It is the Tamil "New Years day". The main deity of this temple Vinayagar is decorated in the previous night and is the first thing to be looked at the Vishu day. The vishu is observed as a gala day by the Chettiyars of Kottar.

On the day of Chithirai Vishu, the temple is opened early in the morning at 4 O'clock. The fruits such as plantains, limes with betels and arcanuts are served to the devotees who visit the temple at that time. This function is called "Kani Kanuthal". Soon after this function is over, the Vinayagar, Siva and Parvathy are taken in procession to the street around the temple. This procession is called "Thirveethi Ula", which takes place in the morning on the day of 'Chithirai Vishu'.<sup>31</sup> The procession takes place only in the morning. But all other temple processions take place only in the evening. It is rare and unique to conduct street procession of the deities of the temple in the morning.

After the 'Thiru Veethi Ula' (Street Procession) is over 'Thiru Amurthu' is supplied to the visitors of the temple on the day of Vishu. In the month of Ani, on the day of 'Uttira Natchathiram' a vizha known as 'Uttiravizha' is celebrated in this temple. It is being conducted to please the God Nataraja Moorthy of this temple. On this day, except 'Ko Puja' and 'Karunira Cheetha' all other pujas are celebrated. God Nataraja is offered with raw-rice mixing ghee on this day. At 10 O'clock in the night Nataraja is taken in procession to the streets.

Festivals conducted in the month of Adi and Thai are the harvest seasons. The harvest in the month of Adi is called 'Kannippoo' and the harvest of the month of Thai is known as Kumpappoo.<sup>32</sup> In these two months rituals are conducted in this temple and they are called 'Nirai'. On these festival days, the Dharmakarthas and other temple servants are given paddy on behalf of the temple. This is what is called 'Pudhu Nelviduthal'.<sup>33</sup>

During 'Kannippoo' festival, before the dawn of the sunrise, the santhikars of the temple, go to the paddy fields connected with this temple with a procession for harvest. After harvesting, they bring the paddy and keep them in front of the Mutharamman Temple and then take them from there to the Vinayagar Temple where a festival is conducted which is called 'Kathir Pooja'. Soon after this puja puddings are prepared and supplied to the house of the committee members of the temple. It is followed by 'Theeparadhanai' to the presiding deity of

the temple. After this function is over, puddings are served to the devotees of the temple.<sup>34</sup> The festival is celebrated in the temple in the month of Thai.

### Vasthu Santhi

'Vasthu Santhi means 'purity' or 'Thuimai' in Tamil. 'Vasthu' represents also the 'Vanatheyvathaikal'. Santhi mean 'Amaithi' in Tamil. In order to create 'Amaithi' Vasthu is being conducted. Accordingly the Santhikars of the temple collect the dried leaves and make them to a bundle which is pulled by them in the streets of Kottar and throw them out and return to the temple, then only the wooden idols are taken in procession to the street. Thus, the rituals and festivals occupies unique place in the socio cultural life of the people in the society.

### END NOTES

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3. S.Brahmanayagam Chettiyar, **Arulmigu Desigavinayagar Koyilum Vazhipadukalum, Vizhakalum** (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1986, p.32.
4. Personal Interview with K.R.Chidambarathanu, (Trustee of the temple), dated, 8.06.2018.
5. Tamil Nadu List of Backward Classes, p.8.
6. **Ibid.**
7. K.C. Manickavasakam, **op.cit.**, p.3.
8. T. Natarajan, **Yamakalathuthuvarkathai**, (folk Song) lines 1-4.
9. M.Brahmanayagam Chettiyar, **op.cit.**, p.39.
10. Personal Interview with S.Chidambarathanu (former committee member of the Temple) dated 11.10.2018.
11. S. Brahmanayagam Chettiyar, **op.cit.**, p.68.
12. **Ibid.**, p.20.
13. **Ibid.**
14. **Ibid.**, p.71.
15. Personal Interview with N. C. Thanu Chettiyar, (Trustee of the Temple), dated 8.7.2018.
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23. **Ibid.**
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25. Nakkirar, **Agananuru**, Poem. No. 141.
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27. **Ibid.**, p.206.
28. T.K.Velu Pillai, **op.cit.**, Vol.I, p.635.
29. **Ibid.**

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31. **Ibid.**
32. **Ibid.**
33. Personal Interview with A. Ganapathy Chettiyar, (Former Trustee of the Temple) dated.20.8.2018.
34. Personal Interview with S. Pazhaniandi Chettiyar, Teacher, D.V.D.H.S.School, Kottar, dated. 17.8.2018.

