

ORIGIN OF KOTTAR DESIGAVINAYAGAR TEMPLE - A STUDY

Dr. S. SIVAKUMAR,

Assistant Professor in History, Thiru Kolanjiappar Govt. Arts College,
Vridhachalam.

Tamil Nadu is noted for many famous temples. Our ancestors gave much importance to temples and they constructed memorable temples in almost all villages. The southern most part of TamilNadu is Kanyakumari District and its capital is Nagercoil. Kottar is situated in the centre of the town Nagercoil. Arulmigu Nainar Desigavinayagar Temple which is located at Kottar. Among all the Vinayagar temples of this district, the famous one is Arulmigu Nainar Desiga Vinayagar temple of Kottar.

The people of Tamil Nadu were experts in temple arts and architecture. This can be proved by the temples constructed by them. They reveal even the early history of our country. It is difficult to say the name of the temple that was constructed first. A large number of temples were ruined or destroyed and hence it is difficult to know their ancient history.¹ But it is said that the Pallava Kings were mainly responsible for the construction of many temples by making use of stones and we can see many such temples in south India.²

Temples were constructed in those days according to the movement of the sun. During certain periods the sun's rays fall on the altar on garpagraha of the temples. Following these principles Nainar Desigavinayagar temple was constructed.

THE ORIGIN OF VINAYAGAR WORSHIP

One of the ancient worship of Hinduism is the Vinayagar worship. There is no function is conducted in the Hindu temple unless a Puja is performed to Vinayagar. All the six branches of Hinduism that is Saivam, Vaishnavam, Shaktam, Koumaram, Kanapatheeyam, Sauram, the Hindus worship Ganapathy. All these branches of Hinduism they worship Ganapathy first. Then they worship their own favourite deities.³ Reference about Ganapathy is found in Rigveda (Rigveda 11'23:1') In it that Ganapathy is made mention as the president of the Brahmanaspathi. Further the characteristics of Ganapathy are also mentioned in the Rigveda. But there is no mention about the head of the elephant. But there is a mention about the tusker of the Ganapathy in the Taittireya Aranyakam.⁴

However, Yagnavalkya belonging to the 5th century A.D makes mention in the book of Neethinool about Ganapathy. He also states that Ganapathy acts as the president of the Bramasthuthi said by Yagnavalkya.⁵ There are different opinions about the Vinayaga worship among the Tamil writers. There is no more reference about the worship of Vinayaga in Sangam Literary works. Further there is no reference about the worship of Vinayaga in epics also but, Tamil scholars of the opinion as though there is no reference either in the Sangam Literary works or epics, Vinayaga worship was popular and he was considered as the foremost God than any other God in Hinduism. The General opinion about the worship of Vinayaga is that this worship became very popular during the time of the Pallava king Narasimhavarma Pallava especially at the time of the invasion of Vadapi.

The author of the book of Thiruthondarpuranam makes mention that Ganapathy was brought from Vadapi during the time of the invasion of Narasimha Pallava. According to N.Subramanian the worship of Vinayaga is originated from the Bootha worship. As the bell of the Vinayagar is very big in size, he is also called as "Boothanathan".⁶ But according to N.Vanamamalai, the origin of the Vinayaga worship is from the Buddhism as Buddha remained under the peepal tree and attained the blessings of God. The statue of Vinayaga is also kept under the peepal tree and hence, Vanamamalai feels same opinion of that origin of the Ganapathy worship is nothing but the religion of Buddhism.⁷

VINAYAGAR 'THATHUVAM'

The term 'Thathuvam' means 'Truth', any activity comes on the basis of Truth. It can also be said as thathuvam which is the basic aspect for the betterment of the life.⁸ Generally the Hindus consider Ganapathi as the God of knowledge and wisdom, and the foremost God among all other deities of Hinduism. The devotees of God Vinayaga believed that Vinayaga is an embodiment of truth and knowledge. Therefore, Vinayagar is stated as "Gnanakozhunthu".⁹ In the famous religious literary work "Thirumandiram", the way of worship of Ganapathy or Vinayagar is explained which is entirely different from other Hindu deities. Those who worship Vinayagar temple have to bend upon in front of the statue minimum three times and worship him. This is a symbolic way in order to create a forbearance in the mind of the human being. Breaking of coconut in front of Ganapathy is a common practice to be adopted by the devotees of SriGanapathy. The significance of this offerings especially to Vinayaga is a symbol to prove that unless we understand the characteristics of the knowledge of the human beings to be broken, then only one can get a real knowledge. Ganapathy is considered as the main deity among all the other deities in the temple. His elephant - like head represent the extraordinary talent of the God. His hair

represent the procher of a saint.¹⁰ His wide and broad ears represents the power of the knowledge for hearing. His five hands represents the creation, protection and destruction. His big stomach symbolically represents, that he will absorb whatever offerings in the Universe.

VINAYAGA TEMPLES IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu is noted for different types of Temples. A number of temples were constructed in Tamil Nadu, only during the times of Chola Kings.¹¹ In order to show our gratitude to a particular place is necessary which is generally said as a Temple. According to Vivekananda, beatings of drums is quiet common just to prove that food is to be served first only to God and then only his devotees and others will have to take food.¹² There are nearly one thousand three hundred Vinayagar temples found in Tamil Nadu. Vinayagar temples are called in different names.¹³ These names are given for particular reasons. Accordingly the Vinayagar temple at Kottar is known as Nainar Desiga Vinayagar Temple. The term Desigan means 'merchant'. At Kottar most of the persons especially the Chettiyars are traders and hence the God Vinayagar that they worship is also known as Desiga Vinayagar".¹⁴

Travancore was one of the southern most princely states of India. It was called by different names at different periods. Its popular name being Venad¹⁵ Vanchidesam¹⁶ and Tiruadidesam.¹⁷ In Malayalam, the name of Travancore was interpreted by Thiruvithamcore and in Sanskrit as Srivardhanapuri or Srivazhumkode, meaning the seat of prosperity.¹⁸ The meaning of the term 'Venad' is the Kingdom of the rulers belonging to the family of 'Vel'. The important rulers of the family of Vel were Aay, Andiram Pari and Pekan. Their kingdom extended upto South Travancore in which Aykudi or Kottar was an ancient commercial centre.

ETOMOLOGY - KOTTAR

The term Kottar is divided into two Tamil words namely "Kodu" plus "Aru". 'Kodu' means malai (mountain) and 'Aru' means 'Vazhi' or 'Pathai' (path) in Tamil.

It is said that one has to cross the mountain to reach Kottar and hence the name "Kottar". Another view is that as this village is on the side of the river Pazhayar and therefore it is called Kottar. 'Aru' in Tamil means nathi¹⁹. The river Pazhayar is mentioned in inscription as 'Kottar'²⁰. The place is also had been praised in one of the poems of Thirugnanasambandar²¹. Kottar was named as Mummudi Cholapuram in an inscription of Rajaraja Chola²².

The village Kottar was under the control of the 'Aay' Kings and therefore bearing the name of Aay kings, the place was called "Aay Kudi Kottar". One of the early travellers by name Ptolemy mentions Kottaru as 'Kottiyara in his travel account.²³ Plini mentions in his book about Kottar as 'Kottara'²⁴.

LOCATION : KOTTAR

Kottar, a flourishing town of Agasteeswaram Taluk, is situated on the main road from Trivandrum to Cape Comerin. It is suburb of Nagercoil town²⁵. Kottar is exactly located at a distance of 20kms from Kanyakumari and very near to the Nagercoil railway station. Kottar is bounded on the East by Kariamanikapuram West by Nagercoil, North and South by Sabayarkulam and Edalakudi respectively.

IMPORTANCE OF KOTTAR

There is a very busy market and the town is also famous for its commercial enterprises. There are numerous shops, High Schools, Police Station, Hospital , Post Office and Railway Station. There is also a famous girls training school named after Kavimani Desigavinayagam Pillai²⁶. There is in the heart of the town, an ancient temple called Nayinar Desigavinayagar and the church founded by Francis Xavier. There is a district hospital and D.V.D. Higher Secondary School. Though it is large enough to be reckoned a separate town by itself, it is a really only a suburb of Nagercoil and the celebrated village of Vadiveeswaram is another suburb not far away from Kottar.

FORMATION OF STREETS

There are many number of streets found in Kottar and among them the most important streets are 'Chettiatheru', Kuruntheru, Vagaiaditheru²⁷, Muthalimar-theru and Chidambaranagar. The temple Desigavinayagar is located in the street called 'Chettia theru'.

PEOPLE - CHETTIYARS

The caste of Chettu is popularly called Chetti. The term chettu means 'frugal' and probably this designation came to be attributed to the community because of their very simple and frugal way of life.

Sub - groups exist among the Chetti of TamilNadu. The different subsects have various kinds of trade and business. The main subsects in the community are Kottar Chetti, Ezhoor

Chetti, Valayal Chetti, Melatheru Chetti, Parakkai Chetti and Pudukkandai Chetti. Among these, the following hints are about 'Elur Chetti'.²⁸

In the past, no marital alliances were allowed between these seven subsects. But now, the Kottar Chetti, Elur Chetti, trying to extend their marital alliances with the remaining two subsects ie the Melatheru and Pudukkandai Chetti. The social, religious and ritual customs of the seven subsects are similar. The Chetties are now distributed in the districts of Kanniyakumari, Tirunelveli, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Salem, Coimbatore, Madras, Pudukkottai and Thiruchirapalli. They claim to be the original inhabitants of Tamilnadu. They speak Tamil among themselves and also outsiders. They use the Tamil Script.

Most of the Chetties are vegetarians. A few eat meat, but not beef or pork. Their staple food is rice. They eat all varieties of locally available vegetables, including roots and tubers. They use ground nut oil for cooking and coconut oil to dress the hair. They consume milk and milk products. Women chew betal leaves without tobacco.

In the past chetties were engaged in business and trade. Now-a-days some of them have adopted agriculture as a subsidiary occupation along with such businesses as money lending, jewellery, manufacturing and trading in metal vessels, cloth, cotton and yarn, and small scale industries. Some of them work as teachers, lawyers, doctors and engineers. They have direct links with the market and dealing cash only.

CHETTI COMMUNITY AND - ITS OWN ASSOCIATION

The Chetti community has its own association. The Elur Chettu Sangam which functions at the village, taluk and district levels. The office - bearers of the association are elected by secret ballot for a three year term. The councils settle various issues, such as disputes over property and theft involving their community people. In case of disputes which the sangam cannot solve, they are referred to a court of law. The sangam safeguards the Chetti trust and implement welfare and development activities²⁹.

Though Kottaru is mostly inhabited by Chettiyars, there are people who belong to other communities also. They belong to the communities such as Pulayar, Parayar, Vellalar, Brahmins and Nairs. Among them only Chettiyars, Vellalars and Brahmins are closely associated with the Arulmigu Nayinar Desika Vinayagar temple.

LANGUAGE

Most of the people in this village speak Malayalam, as they were part and parcel of the erstwhile State of Travancore. As they belong to Kerala origin their customs and manners are also like the people of Kerala.³⁰ At present especially the Elur Chetti speak only Tamil and they follow the customs and manners of the people of Tamilnadu.

Transport facilities are numerous as Kottar is located very near to Nagercoil. It is quiet easy and convenient to the people from the neighbouring village come first to Nagercoil via Anna bus stand which is quiet near to Kottar. Buses, plying from this bus stand towards the southern part through Kottar only. Further people from other places can come to Kottar via Chettikulam the nearest suburb of Kottar. Notonly Nesamoney Corporation buses, most of the private mini buses and share autoes go to the neighbouring villages via Kottar only. Therefore it is quiet convenient not only to the people of Kottar but also to the places near Kottar like Parakkai, Vadiveeswaram, Thuckalai, Padmanabhapuram, Eraniel, Ganapthipuram. People from those places quiet often visit the temple for offering pujas and especially on festive occasions of the temple such as Vinayagar Chadurthi, Egathasi etc.

END NOTES

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11. T.A.GopinathRao, **op.cit.**, p.8.
12. **The complete work of Swami Vivekananda**, Vol IV, Mayavathi memorial edition eight, 1962, p.40.
13. S.Dhandapani Desigar, **Ganapathy**, Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam Publications, 1956, p.73.
14. Personal Interview with K.Desiappan Moopanan, dated with 7.8.2018.
15. Venad is originally known as vanavanad which means the abode of the Devas, which was latter simplified into Venad.
16. Vanchi - desam means either the land of treasure or the land of bamboos.
17. Thiru - adidesam is derived from the title of one of the rural rulers called Tiruadikal.
18. A. Sreedhara Menon, **Trivandrum District Gazetteers**, Trivandrum, 1962, p.118.
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