

NAVAGRAHA STHALA (RAGU TEMPLE) AT THIRUNAGESWARAM – A STUDY

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Abstract

The holy shrine for Lord Nageswarar, Naganathar and Shanbakaranyeswarar at Thirunageswaram has been noted for the worship of the Navagraha Ragu. Ragu has been called as the "ascending node of the moon". In this temple also there is a separate shrine for Ragu. The Sthala Viruksha of the temple is the "Shanbaga tree" and the holy tank is called the "Sooriya Thirtham". The temple has the Devara Pathigangal sung by Saint Thirunavukkarasar, Thirugnanasambandar, Sundarar and Seikkizhar. The temple is closely associated with Saint Seikkizhar who performed the renovatory works in the temple. The unique feature of the temple is that, when milk abhishta has been performed to Ragu alias Nagaraja, the white colour of the milk turns into "blue". So far as Ragu is concerned, there is no specific day is attributed, hence, the devotees offer worship to Ragu at any day as per their wish. Ragu Sthala at Thirunageswaram has become a Sthala for performing poojas, archanas and abhishtas for those who have been afflicted with "Ragu tosa". The holy shrine is the 29* Saivite temples located on the southern bank of the river Cauvery. The original name of the temple is Sri Naganatha Swamy temple and the Presiding deity is Sri Naganatha Swamy. His consort is known as Sowndiranayaki. The Sthala Viruksha of the temple is the bamboo tree and the holy tank is called Nagathirtham. The temple has the reputation of being visited, worshipped and sung holy Devara hymns by Saint Thirunavukkarasar, Thirugnanasambandar and Sundarar. As a result of the study, there ought to arise a striking contrast between two "poles" namely "faith" and "the

advancement of science and technology". Any higher religion based on faith has no logical base, where as science and technology is logical oriented. But, the advancement of Science and Technology do not have any major impact over the religious oriented life of the people. In the recent past, astrology comprising of horoscope, Vastu Sastra and the like have gained momentum and accelerated the religious fervour among the people.

Keywords - Temple, Architecture, Sculpture, Drawings

Introduction

Nearly everyone who visits South India returns with the impression that it is a land of temples. North India, too, was as much a land of temples, but having been relatively free from frequent foreign invasions, the country south of the Vindhyas was able to protect a large number of its religious monuments from wanton destruction of calculated negligence. This historical circumstance accounts for a more continuous development of the art of temple building in the south, free from the arresting influences of alien cultures, which came to dominate North India, from the thirteenth century. South India is dotted with thousands of temples, many of them old and some in ruins. Apart from the famous temple-towns, a good number of villages and towns have two or more temples, some so ancient and venerated that they have become places of pilgrimage. A large majority of the existing temples are simple, unostentatious structures with no great artistic merit. The really great ones are monuments of considerable antiquity, the oldest of them dating back to fourteenth century. Besides their antiquity and artistic excellence, there is the interesting fact that these temples have gone through a long evolutionary process documenting, as it were, the history of South Indian culture.

Temple History

Thirunageswaram, the Ragu Sthala has been located six kilometres away from Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district. Thirunageswaram is the place which was worshipped by the serpent king Ragu, hence came to be known as Thirunageswaram. The holy place has the unique feature of being worshipped by lord Vinayaga, So Cريان, Saints like Gauthama, Parasarar, and kings like Nala, Pandavas and especially worshipped by the serpent kings namely Athisheshan, Karkodan and Sri Ragu. Sri Naganatha swamy temple at Thirunageswaram also has the unique feature of being visited and song holy hymnals by the Saivite saints Thiruganasambandar,

Thirunavukkarasar, Sundarar and Arunagirinathar. There is a separate shrine for Ragu in the south western corner of the outer prahara of the temple. As per puranic sources, Ragu, not only worshipped the lord of the temple, but also paved the way to the devotees that offering worship to him, he also can grant grace to the devotees.

Ragu, who is capable of granting the desires and wishes of the devotees who offer worship to him can be seen in the temples at Rameswaram, Kalakasthi, Thirukkalar, but he occupies a special place only at Thirunageswaram where he is housed in a separate shrine along with his two consorts. In the Cholamandala there are 274 holy Saivite shrines having the unique feature of having been visited, and sung holy hymnals by the Devaram Trios. There are 127 such shrines are located just south to the river Cauvery and Thirunagehswaram is one among such holy shrines possessing the holy hymnals of the Devaram trios.

The holy shrine is also noted for the Moorthy, Sthalam and Thirtham. This Sthalam is also known for its association with saint Seikizhar who is said to have obtained Gnana here. To substantiate this fact, there are the images of Seikizhar, his mother and Palaravayar, the brother of Sekizhar. Saint Seikizhar undertook renovatory works in the temple. It is located west of Thiruneelakkudi, North of the river Arisol. Thirunageswaram is otherwise known as Shanbagavanam, Girikannikaivanam etc., The famous Vaishnavite temple Uppiliyappan temple, which is otherwise known as "Then " Thiruppathy"

In the book south Indian Images, it has been noted as:

"The village is now known not only for its Naganatha Swamy Temple, but its uppiliappan or Thiruvinnagar shrine referred to in the Prabandas. According to saiva tradition This place is noted for the worship of Indira. The God's bane us chanpaharanyeswara and 3 the thirtha is Indira thirtha".

Legend :

Ragu was born to "Vipra sithi", an Asura king and "simmiagai" an asura queen. Ragu, an asura had a desire to eat Amudam, the divine cream which was extracted from the Thiruparkadal. As he happened to be an asura he had no privilege to have a share in Amudam, but still he wanted to eat it some how. Hence, in the disguise of a Deva, he mingled- with them and ate the

desired Amuda. But, any how. Lord Thirumal discovered the fraud caused by Ragu, hence smote him on his head heavily with the giant spoon. As a result of this heavy blow, his head changed in to the form of Ragu and the body changed into Kethu. Hence both Ragu and kethu are seen opposite to each other in the Rasi mandala.

As per the puranic source as, the earth rotates round the sun in an elongated circular form. Likewise chandran or the moon also rotates the sun in the same way. During such rotation, on its way the moon meets the earth twice. When the moon, when goes up in its rotation intersects with the earth and that place has been called Ragu, while the moon comes down and intersect with the earth and the place is known as Kethu. Ragu has been known as "Ascending Node" and Kethu has been known as "Descending node" . Both Ragu and Kethu are known as "shadow planets." Both are located, just up and down, in a straight line to the earth and located 180 opposite to each other.

The Thirunageshchurappuranam, composed by Thiru. Singaravelu pillai furnishes further details about the legends associated with the temple. As per the Purana, Nagarajan, the serpent king used to worship Lord siva in a sivarathiri at four Sthalas. During the first jamam (early part of the night) he worshipped the Lord at "Vilvavanam", the eastern part of the temple at Kumbakonam, in the second part of the night he worshipped at "Shanbagavanam" (Thirunageswaram) and in the third part of the night, he worshipped at "Vannivanam" (Thirupambiram) and obtained the bliss of the Lord . All these four sthalas as are known by the name of Nagaraja.

More over, from the Sthala purana, we infer further details who worshipped the Lord and obtained his grace. Devaram mentions as " Thirunageswaram" which means that the Siva Nandhi reached this place, worshipped the Lord and obtained his grace. Sooriyan worshipped at this temple and obtained the grace of the Lord. Lord Vinayaga worshipped the Lord of this temple and as a result of the worship, he became the head of the Putha Ganangal. Gauthama Saint worshipped the Lord and as a reward of Agaligai. King Nala offered worship and got united with his wife. Saint Parasara got relieved from his sins only after worshipping the Lord of the temple. As a result of their worship, the Pandavas got back their lost wealth, hence performed the Karthigai celebrations. Saint Vashishta worshipped the Lord and got his grace. Lord Indira as per the instructions of a bird, worshipped the Lord and got an elevated position., Both Brahma and

Bhahiratha worshipped at this place and purified themselves. A king called Chitra senan, performed a celebration in the month of Vaikasi and blessed with a child. Saunaga Saint who was accursed for lustful activities, got relieved from, that sin. Saint Nargunan, after performing poojas during Kaxthikai 5 Somavarams and got life to his son who died due to snake bite.

Sambumali, a King of Kerala used to perform very many charitable activities every day to those who approached him charities. One day a Saint by name Kalangiri approached him and requested him for same charity. Unfortunately, on that day, the king had given away everything that he had kept for charity purposed and could not help the saint. Hence, the king got annoyed and cursed the king to become a devil and to loiter accordingly. The king got shocked over the curse and fell on the knees of the saint and prayed him as to how, he can be relieved from the curse. The saint also took pity on him and instructed him to visit 1008 Saivite Sthalas with the same devil form and offer worship to the deities. Finally, he should reach Shanbagavanam or Thirunagawaram, to have a holy bath in the Sooriya Pushkarani and to worship the Lord Sri Naganatha Peruman and the Amman Kunru Mamulaiammai. Sambumali also followed the instructions of the saint seriously and finally got relieved from the curse. The image of sambumali can be seen in one of the pillars of the Alangara Mandapa.

Architecture :

The temple is located towards the east having Rajagopuras on all four sides. There are three praharas, Madavilagam, and broad streets around the temple for the purpose of drawing the temple car. The eastern gopura having five tiers is the main gateway to enter into the temple, having entered into the temple, the Nirutha Ganapathy, Nandhi Devar and the Vinayagar are located. At the left is seen the Sooriya Pushkarani and in the right is located the hundred pillared hall. Entering into inner gopura, along with the walls of the prahara, there are a series of Mandapas. When entering further, there exists the Alangara Mandapa. The Vahanas of the temple are also seen there. Here located the shrines for the Navagrahas.

Next to the first prahara next to the Sanctum and Sanctorum, in the western side are seen the shrines of Vinayaga, Chandrasekar, Kuruga, Panchalingas,. Lakshmi and the Palliyarai. In the north are located the images of the Nayyanmars, the shrine of Sri. Nataraja. In the south are

located the shrines of Sheikizhar, Palaravayar and their mother. At the right of the Sheikizhar shrine is located the Adikara Nandhi.

The presiding deity shrine of the temple is in the form of Somaskanda. Here are seen the shrines of Muruga, Piraiyannival Nuthal Ammai. In the Koshtam are seen the images of Maheswara Moorthikal. The temple has another Amman called Grijambigai(Kunrumamulai Ammai) which is grand in style. Out side this shrine are seen the images of Jain saints. In the inner prahara of the shrine of Girijambigai, there are the shrines of Iyyanar and Navasakthigal. Inside the cellar, Grijambigai so seen in tapas position. Next to her are seen both Thirumagal and Kalaimagal. The temple measures 800 feet east west and 680 feet North West.

The Vinayaga of this temple has been known as Shanbaga Vinayagar, and Santru Vinayaga. The presiding deity has been known as Naganatha, Nageswara. As per the inscriptions, he has been known as shanbagaraniyeswarar, Thiruriageswaram Udayar, Mahadcvr. The Sthala Virutchal of the temple. They are So Sriya Thirtham, Imaya Thirtham, Brahma Thirtham, Gautama Thirtham, Parasara Thirtham, Indra Thirtham, Pirugu Thirtham, Kahvathirtham and Vashishta Thirtham.

Inscriptions :

There are as many as 16 inscriptions found within the temple at various places, they have been copied down by the Archaeological survey of India during 1897-1911. Those inscriptions copied down have been assigned the numbers 81-84 and those copied down have been assigned the numbers 211-222. Most of the inscriptions are intact and a few of them are mutilated. A short text of the inscriptions has been detailed below:

Inscription 81/1897 :

This inscription is found on the wall of the Mandapa of the Sanctum Sanctorum, and seen in a mutilated form. It describes the donation of land to the temple by Rajakesarivarman Rajarajachola I.

Inscription 82/1897 :

This inscription is also seen on the same place. It says that at the 14th regnal year of Rajaraja I, a queen has donated land to the temple.

Inscription 83/1897 :

It has been seen in the central Mandapa in a mutilated form. It mentions the name of the king Parakesari Varman Rajendra Chola Deva.

Inscription 84/1897 :

This inscription can be seen in the southern wall of the second prahara. It speaks about the donation of a land by Thiribhuvana Chakravarthi Koncrimej, kaondah in his 14' regnal year.

Inscription 211/1911 :

This inscription can be seen on the northern wall of the Nagahath'a's shrine. As per the text of the inscriptions, Parak[^]sarivarman Raje"ndra Chola", in his 6 regnal year donated a golden ornament studded with pearls.

Inscription 212/1911 :

This inscription can be seen in the same place which says the donation of 48 houses by Arayan Uthamadevi in remembrance of her daughter for the purpose of providing oil lamps in the temple.

Inscription 213/1911 :

This inscription also can be seen in the same place, issued by Rajendra Choladeva in his 14 regnal year. It mentions the donations of silver vessels to the temple as per the orders of the king.

Inscription 214/1911 :

This inscription is found on the wall of the sanctum sanctorum. It belongs to Sri Rajendra Chola Deva, issued in his 2nd regnal year. It mentions about the receipt of 100 gold coins from Vikrama Singappallavar'ayan of Marulhavur. The amount had been spent for the purpose of maintaining the irrigation canals which got destroyed as a result of the flood of the river Cauvery.

Inscription 215/1911:

It is an incomplete inscription found on the southern wall of the shrine of the Swamy Nagcswara. It has been issued in the 901th regnal year of Rajakcsarivarman Kandaradita Chola. As per the available text, it has been mentioned that the king had given donations to the temple for the conduct of pSojas.

Inscription 216/1911 :

This inscription also can be seen at the same place, which belongs to Riiendra Chola I. It says that Pasayathdeva has been taken out in procession.

Inscription 217/1911 :

This inscription also can be seen on the southern wall and issued in the 32nd regnal year of Parakesarivarman Rajandra Chola I . It details the donations of land, gold coins and the installation of Arthanariswara's idol in the Prahadeswara Swamy temple.

Inscription 218/1911 :

This inscription is located at the same place and issued by Rajakesarivarman Rajaraja Chola I in his 14 regnal year. It also mentions about the donations, purchase of land for the temple, and the donations made by Arunjigai Piratti for the conduct of pbojas in the temple.

Inscription 219/1911 :

It is also found at the same place in an mutilated form. It mentions about the Lord Naganalha and the Chola King Gandarathitha.

Inscription 220/1911 :

It is seen on the western wall of the first prahara. It has been issued in the 19 regnal year of Thiribhuvana Chakravarthi Rajaraja Cholall. It mentions about the donations of lands located at to Thirunageswaran Udayar temple.

Inscription 221/1911 :

It is in a mutilated form and found in the southern wall of the first Prahara. It says that Parakesari Varman Rajaraja Chola Deva II had donated lands to the temple.

Inscription 222/1911 :

This inscription is located from a pillar which lies in a mandapa just opposite to the temple. It explains the details of donations offered to the temple.

Poojas and Festivals :

Daily, for five times poojas performed to the deifies. During the poojas, the deifies are given holy bath, fresh dresses and decorated with flowers. The temple priests, according to the agama rites perform the poojas. On special occasions, archanas, and abhishehas also have been performed. At every pooja; Neivcthiams are distributed to the devotees. Musical instruments are also played. The temple Oduvars sing hymns from DevaTram.

The temple is noted for its festivals.

The grand festival called the "Brahmorchavam" has been celebrated every year in a grand style which begins on the third Friday of the month Karthigai. It goes on for ten days. Every day, the temple is busy with the activities of the festivals on the ninth day is celebrated the "Car festival". The temple car is decorated, richly and the Urchavar with alluring decorations, seated on the temple car, and the car goes round all the four main car streets located around the temple. Large number of people, in and around the place throng at the place and witness the wonderful scene of the car festival. The final leg of the festival falls on the last Sunday of the month, with the performance of Thirthavari in the Sbbriya Pushkarani. In the month of Markazhi, on the Thiruvathirai star, Lord Nataraja is taken out in procession along the streets. On the first day of the month Thai, Goddess Girigujambugai will be adorned with "Punugu Sattam". In the month of Masi, during the second leg of Sivarathiri, the celebration of Nagaraja will be performed. On the full moon day of the month chithirai, Lord Singaravela" is taken out in procession. On the 18th day of the month Adi, the Amman of the temple is taken to Nattar and offer Thirtha to the deities. The Navarathri festival has been celebrated with pomp and show during the month purattasi. On every full moon day "Nirai Pani Vizha" has been celebrated. Other festivals like Skantha Shashti, Sodrasamhara have been fittingly celebrated.

Astrological aspects of Ragu :

The powers of Ragu has been discussed in detail in the Astrological works namely "Jathaka Alangaram" and "Thandava Malai". They mention, that among the Navagrahas, Seyyai is greater than Sani, Puthan is greater than Sevyai, Guru is greater than Puthan, Sukkiran is greater than Guru, Chandran is greater than Sukkiran, and Sooriyan is greater than Chandran. But both Ragu and Kethu are greater than the above cited grahas. Here, the word "greatness" implies the meaning "Power, both good and bad". The powers of Ragu and Kethu has been known as "Nai Sarkka Balam" as per the science of Astrology. Both Ragu and Kethu has the power even to subdue or to make powerless even the sun and the Moon. For Ragu, as per astrology, neither a house nor a rasi is due to. Hence, in the absence of houses and Rasis, both Ragu and Kethu, when seated along with any one of the other Navagrahas, they are said to grant good fortunes.

Ragu is the authority for good fortune, arid grants good fortunes to those, as per the position of Ragu in their jataka. This fact has been cited in the Astrological work "Jathaka Alangaram",

As per this sutra, if Ragu stands in Mesham, Rishabam, Kadagam, Kanni, Maharam, they will obtain Parvatha yogam.

Moreover, thbse persons with such jataka position can become great persons and even live like kings. As per another astrological work called "Jataka Parijatham",

According to this sijtra if Ragu is present in 3, 6 and 12 positions, be grants Rajayogam.

The nature of Ragu and Kethu has been defined in another astrological work called "Maruthu Yogam".

The sutra defines that if Ragu is present at any position and in association with any other Navagraha, he will grant all the fortunes.

Moreover, if Ragu is present in a favourable position in ones horoscope, he will be blessed with good wife, children, servants, good status, proficiency in languages, influence in politics, the fortune to govern etc., He is also responsible for granting the powers of magic,

Indrajalam, Mantrajalam and so on. At the same time, "Ragu Thosham" is a contrary character of Ragu. If any falls under this "thosham" or "affliction" have to under go lot of troubles and misfortunes. If Ragu is present in the 7 house of one's horoscope, it causes the delay in marriage, and if present in the 5* house, it causes childlessness or "Puthira thosham".

Hence, to get relieved from these afflictions, special offerings has to be performed to Ragu so as to appease him. Saint Thirunavukkarasar, while praising the glory of the Lord Thirunagcswaran Peruman.

The saint mentions Ragu as the five headed serpent. At this shrine, when milk abhisheka is performed to the idol of Ragu, the milk becomes blue in colour.

Ragu Thosham and Relief:

Ragu thasai lasts for I years. To get relieved from the enmities, fears, puthira tlibsam, delay in marriage, it has been advised to worship Nagaraja, Durga, and to wear ornaments made out of silver with the figure of the Nagam or serpent, to wear Gom"ethagam (Sardonyx), to offer black gram as charity. Moreover, those afflicted with the 'thosa' must perform abhisheka to Ragu, adorning him with black dress, Gome thagamani, Neclamantharai, Iluppaiflower. The fire pit should be lit with aruganpul and as Neiveithiyam, rice -mixed with blackgram power should be offered. After camphor Diparatharia, hymns on Ragu can be sung in Ragappiriya tune.

Possessions of Ragu :

1	Gothiram - Baidinasar	13	Samithu - Arugu
2	Favourite deity - Cow	14	Grain - Blackgram
3	Prathyathi- Snake	15	Metal - Black Stone
4	Worshipping Lord – Durga Serpant/Badra Kali	16	Gem - Gomethagam / Sardonyx
5	Authority- Nil	17	Travel period in the Rasi- 1.5 years
6	Direction- South west	18	Thasai -18 years
7	Language- Alien Language	19	Food - Blackgram rice
8	Caste- Sankiramar	20	Son - Amutha Kadigam
9	Dress- Black	21	Possession – Gnanakaragan
10	Consort- Simhee	22	Fortun-3.6 Good fortune

11	Vehicle- Goat	23	Slhala- Thirunagcswaram / Kalakasthi
12	Flower – Mantharai		

Conclusions

The holy shrine for Lord Nageswarar, Naganathar and Shanbakaranyeswarar at Thirunageswareim has been noted for the worship of the Navagraha Ragu. Ragu has been called as the "ascending node of the moon". In this temple also there is a separate shrine for Ragu. The Sthala Viruksha of the temple is the "Shanbaga tree" and the holy tank is called the "Sooriya Thirtham". The temple has the Devara Pathigangal sung by Saint Thirunavukkarasar, Thirugnanasambandar, Sundarar and Seikhkizhar. The temple is closely associated with Saint Seikhkizar who performed the renovatory works in the temple. The unique feature of the temple is that, when milk abhisha has been performed to Ragu alias Nagaraja, the white colour of the milk turns into "blue". So far as Ragu is concerned, there is no specific day is attributed, hence, the devotees offer worship to Ragu at any day as per their wish. Ragu Sthala at Thirunageswaram has become a Sthala for performing poojas, archanas find abhishekas for those who have been afflicted with i "Ragu thosa". The holy shrine is the 29* Saivite temples located on the southern bank of the river Cauvery. The original name of the temple is Sri Naganatha Swamy temple and the Presiding deify is Sri Naganatha Swamy. His consort is known as Sowndiranayaki. The Sthala Viruksha of the temple is the bamboo tree and the holy tank is called Nagathirtham. The temple has the reputation of being visited, worshipped and sung holy Devara hymnals by Saint Thirunavukkarasar, Thirugrianasambandar and Sundarar.

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