CHAPTER XI

Ragu Sthala at Thirunageswaram
Thirunāgéswaram, the Rāgu Sthalā has been located six kilometres away from Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district. Thirunāgéswaram is the place which was worshipped by the serpent king Rāgu, hence came to be known as Thirunāgéswaram. The holy place has the unique feature of being worshipped by lord Vināyagā, Sōriyan, Saints like Gauṭhamā, Parāsārār, and kings like Nalā, Pāṇḍavās and especially worshipped by the serpent kings namely Āṭiṣhēṣhan, KĀrkōdan and Sri Rāgu. Sri Nāganātha swāmy temple at Thirunāgéswaram also has the unique feature of being visited and song holy hymnals by the Saivite saints Thirugānasāmbandar, Thirunavuṅkarārar, Sundarar and Aruṅagarīnāthar. There is a separate shrine for Rāgu in the south western corner of the outer prahāra of the temple. As per puranic sources, Rāgu, 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.

Rāgu, who is capable of granting the desires and wishes of the devotees who offer worship to him can be seen in the temples at Rāmeswaram, Kālakaṭṭhi, Thirukkālar, but he occupies a special place only at Thirunāgéswaram where he is housed in a separate shrine along with his two consorts. In the Chōlamāndala there are 274 holy Saivite shrines having the unique feature of having been visited, and sung holy hymnals by the Dēvaram Trīōs. There are 127 such shrines are located just south to the river Cauvery and
Thirunāgēswaram is one among such holy shrines possessing the holy hymnals of the Devaram trios.

The holy shrine is also noted for the Mōorthy, Sṭhālam and Thirtham. This Sṭhālam is also known for its association with saint Śeikžēhar who is said to have obtained Gnāṇā here. To substantiate this fact, there are the images of Śeikžēhar, his mother and Pālarāvāyar, the brother of Śeikžēhar. Saint Śeikžēhar undertook renovatory works in the temple. It is located west of Thirunēēlakkuḍi, North of the river Arisōl. Thirunāgēswaram is otherwise known as Šaṇbagavaṇam, Girikannikaivaṇam 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 Prabandhas. According to saiva tradition This place is noted for the worship of Indira. The God's bane us chanpaharanyeswara and the thirtha is Indira thirtha".
Moreover, the specialty of the temple has been given in the paudiya purana.

**Legend:**

Rāgu was born to "Vipra sithi", an Asura king and "simmiagai" an asura queen. Rāgu, an asura had a desire to eat Amudam, the divine cream which was extracted from the Thirupārkadal. As he happened to be an asura he had no privilege to have a share in Amudam, but still he wanted to eat it somehow. Hence, in the disguise of a Dēvā, he mingled with them and ate the desired Amudā. But, any how, Lord Thirumāl discovered the fraud caused by Rāgu, hence smote him on his head heavily with the giant spoon. As a result of this heavy blow, his head changed into the form of Rāgu and the body changed into Kēthu. Hence both Rāgu and kēthu are seen opposite to each other in the Rāsi mandala.

As per the puranic source as, the earth rotates round the sun in an elongated circular form. Likewise chaṇḍran 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 Rāgu, while the moon comes down and intersect with the earth and the place is known as Kēthu. Rāgu has been known as "Ascending Node" and Keīthu has been known as "Descending node". Both Rāgu and Kēthu 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 Thirunāgēshchurappuraṇam, composed by Thiru. Singārvel piḷḷai furnishes further details about the legends associated with the temple. As per the Purāna, Nāgarājan, the serpent king used to worship Lord siva in a sivarāṭhirī at four Sthalās. During the first āhīm(early part of the night) he worshipped the Lord at "Vilvavaṇām", the eastern part of the temple at Kumbakonam, in the second part of the night he worshipped at "Shaṅbagavaṇām"(Thirunāgēswaram)and in the third part of the night, he worshipped at "Vaṇṇivaṇām"(Thirupāmbiram) and obtained the bliss of the Lord. All these four sthalas as are known by the name of Nāgarāja.

More over, from the Sthala purāṇa, we infer further details who worshipped the Lord and obtained his grace. Devaram mentions as "NāgaśīrumThirunāgēswaram" which means that the Siva Nandhi reached this place, worshipped the Lord and obtained his grace. Sōōriyan worshipped at this temple and obtained the grace of the Lord. Lord Vināyaga worshipped the Lord of this temple and as a result of the worship, he became the head of the Pūtha Gaṇaṅga. Gaṇthamā Saint worshipped the Lord and as a reward of Agaligai. King Nalā offered worship and got united with his wife. Saint Parasāra got relieved from his sins only after worshipping the Lord of the temple. As a result of their worship, the Pāndava got back their
lost wealth, hence performed the Kārthigai celebrations. Saint Vāṣṭiṣṭā worshipped the Lord and got his grace. Lord Iṇḍira as per the instructions of a bird, worshipped the Lord and got an elevated position. Both Brahma and Bhāhirathā worshipped at this place and purified themselves. A king called Chiṭra senan, performed a celebration in the month of Vaikasi and blessed with a child. Saunāga Saint who was accursed for lustful activities, got relieved from that sin. Saint Nargunaṇ, after performing poojas during Kārthikai Somavarams and got life to his son who died due to snake bite.

Sambumāli, a King of Kērala used to perform very many charitable activities every day to those who approached him charities. One day a Saint by name Kālaṅgiri 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 Sthalās with the same devil form and offer worship to the deities. Finally, he should reach Shanbagavanam or Thirunāgēawaram, to have a holy bath in the Soōriya Puṣṭkaraṇī and to worship the Lord Sri Nāganātha Peṟumān and the Amman Kunru Māmulaiyammai. Sambumāli also followed the instructions of the saint seriously and finally got relieved from the
curse. The image of sambumāli can be seen in one of the pillars of the Alangāra Mandapā.

_Architecture:_

The temple is located towards the east having Rajagōpurās on all four sides. There are three prahārās, Madavilāgam, and broad streets around the temple for the purpose of drawing the temple car. The eastern gōpurā having five tiers is the main gateway to enter into the temple. Having entered into the temple, the Nīrutha Gaṇapatī, Naṇḍhi Devar and the Vināyagar are located. At the left is seen the Sōōriya Puṣhkaraṇi and in the right is located the hundred pillared hall. Entering into inner gōpurā, along with the walls of the prahārā, there are a series of Mandapaṅ. When entering further, there exists the Alaṅgāra Mandapā. The Vāhanās of the temple are also seen there. Here located the shrines for the Navagrahās.

Next to the first prahara next to the Sanctum and Sanctorum, in the western side are seen the shrines of Vināyagā, Chandrasēkar, Kuruga, Panchalingās, Lakṣmi and the Palliyarai. In the north are located the images of the Nāyyaṇmārs, the shrine of Sri. Natarāja. In the south are located the shrines of Śheikīţhar, Pālārāvāyar and their mother. At the right of the Śheikīţhar shrine is located the Ādikāra Naṇḍhi.

The presiding deity shrine of the temple is in the form of Sōmaskaṇḍa. Here are seen the shrines of Murugā, Piraiyannival
Nuthal Ammai. In the Kōśhtam are seen the images of Mahēswarā Mōörthikal. The temple has another Amman called Grijāmbigai (Kunrumāmulai Ammai) which is grand in style. Out side this shrine are seen the images of Jain saints. In the inner prahārā of the shrine of Grijāmbigai, there are the shrines of Jyyanar and Navasakthigal. Inside the cellar, Grijāmbigai 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 Vināyaga of this temple has been known as Šanbaga Vināyagar, and Sanṭru Vināyaga. The presiding deify has been known as Nāganātha, Nāgeśwara. As per the inscriptions, he has been known as shanbagāraṇiyēśvarar, Thirunāgeśwaram Udāyār, Mahādēvar. The Sthala Viruṭcha of the temple. They are Sōōriya Thīrtham, Imaya Thīrtham, Brahma Thīrtham, Čautama Thīrtham, Parāsāra Thīrtham, Īndra Thīrtham, Piṛugu Thīrtham, Kānvathīrtham and Vaśhishtā Thīrtham.

**Inscriptions:**

There are as many as 16 inscriptions found with in 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 884 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 have 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 Rājakēsarivarman Rājarājachōla I.

Inscription 82/1897:

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

Inscription 83/1897:

It has been seen in the central Mandapā in a mutilated form. It mentions the name of the king Parakēsari Varman Rājēndra Chōla Dēva.

Inscription 84/1897:

This inscription can be seen in the southern wall of the second prahāra. It speaks about the donation of a land by Thiribhuvana Chakravarthi Kōnērimēk̄kaīndā in his 14th regnal year.

Inscription 211/1911:

This inscription can be seen on the northern wall of the Nagānathā's shrine. As per the text of the inscriptions, Parakēsarivarman Rājēndra Chōla, in his 6th 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 Ārayan Uthamādevī 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 Rājēndra Chōladēva in his 14th 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 Rājēndra Chōla Dēva, issued in his 2nd regnal year. It mentions about the receipt of 100 gold coins from Vikrama Singappallavarāyan of Maruthāvur. 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 Swāmy Nāgēswara. It has been issued in the 97th regnal year of Rājakēsarivarman Kandarādiṭa Chōla. As per the available text, it has been mentioned that the king had given donations to the temple for the conduct of pōōjas.
Inscription 216/1911:

This inscription also can be seen at the same place, which belongs to Rājēndra Chōla I. It says that Pāsāyathdeva 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 Rājāndra Chōla I. It details the donations of land, gold coins and the installation of Arthanāriswarā’s idol in the Prahadēswarā Swāmy temple.

Inscription 218/1911:

This inscription is located at the same place and issued by Rājakēsarivarman Rājarāja Chōla I in his 14th regnal year. It also mentions about the donations, purchase of land for the temple, and the donations made by Arunjigai Pirāṭṭi for the conduct of pūḍjas in the temple.

Inscription 219/1911:

It is also found at the same place in an mutilated form. It mentions about the Lord Nāganātha and the Chōla King Gandarāthīṭha.

Inscription 220/1911:

It is seen on the western wall of the first prahara. It has been issued in the 19th regnal year of Thiribhuvana Chakravarthi Rājarāja.
Chōlall. It mentions about the donations of lands located at Thirunāraiyūr to Thirunāgēswaran Udayār temple.

**Inscription 221/1911:**

It is in a mutilated form and found in the southern wall of the first Prahārā. It says that Parakesari Varman Rājarāja Chōla Dēva II had donated lands to the temple.

**Inscription 222/1911:**

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

**Pōōjas and Festivals:**

Daily, for five times pōōjas performed to the deities. During the pōōjas, the deities are given holy bath, fresh dresses and decorated with flowers. The temple priests, according to the agama rites perform the pōōjas. On special occasions, archanās, and abhishēhās also have been performed. At every pōōja; Neivēthiams are distributed to the devotees. Musical instruments are also played. The temple Ōduvārs sing hymns from Dēvāram.

The temple is noted for its festivals. The grand festival called the “Brahmōrĉhavam” has been celebrated every year in a grand style which begins on the third Friday of the month Kārthigai. 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 Thirthavāri in the Sōōriya Puṣḥkaṛaṇi. In the month of Markāḻhi, on the Thiruvāṭhirai star, Lord Natarāja is taken out in procession along the streets. On the first day of the month Thai, Goddess Girigujāmbugai will be adorned with “Puṇugu Sattam”. In the month of Māsi, during the second leg of Sivarāṭhirai, the celebration of Nāgārāja will be performed. On the full moon day of the month chiḻhirai, Lord Singāravela is taken out in procession. On the 18th day of the month Ādi, the Amman of the temple is taken to Nāttār and offer Thirtha to the deities. The Navarāṭhirī festival has been celebrated with pomp and show during the month purattāsi. On every full moon day “Nirai Pani Vizha” has been celebrated. Other festivals like Skanṭha Shaṣṭhi, Sōōrasamhara have been fittingly celebrated.

A note worthy aspect to be mentioned here is that the people belonging to the “Senguntha Mudaliar” community actively involve themselves in the celebrations of the festivals of the temple.
Finance and Administration:

As per the inscriptive sources, it has been inferred that the chōlas, right from Rājarāja Chōla I, have donated lot of lands, golden and silver ornaments, wooden and metal vāhanās, and very many endowments for the proper maintenance of the temple. But at present, the temple has 60 velis of land which are located at Sannāpuram, Muduṅkangudi, Ivarpādi and Krishnāpuram Villages. For the conduct of pōōjas a few endowments also have been created called Natarāja Kaṭṭalai, Kumārakkāṭṭalai etc.

The temple is under the control of the Hindu Religious and charitable Endowment Board. The Executive officer, the Board of Trustees are responsible for the proper administration of the temple. There is an office with in the temple complex to look after the day to day administration of the temple. There is variety of employees to carry out the functions of the temple.

Astrological aspects of Rāgu:

The powers of Rāgu has been discussed in detail in the Astrological works namely “Jāthaka Alangāram” and “Thāndava Mālai”. They mention, that among the Navagrahās, Seyyai is greater than Sani, Puthan is greater than Seyyai, Guru is greater than Puthan, Sukkiran is greater than Guru, Chandran is greater than Sukkiran, and Sōoriyan is greater than Chaṇḍran. But both Rāgu and Kēthu are greater than the above cited grahās. Here, the word
"greatness" implies the meaning "Power, both good and bad". The powers of Rāgu and Kēthu has been known as “Nai Sarkka Balam” as per the science of Astrology. Both Rāgu and Kēthu has the power even to subdue or to make powerless even the sun and the Moon. For Rāgu, as per astrology, neither a house nor a rasi is due to. Hence, in the absence of houses and Rāsis, both Rāgu and Kēthu, when seated along with any one of the other Navagrahās, they are said to grant good fortunes.

Rāgu is the authority for good fortune, and grants good fortunes to those, as per the position of Rāgu in their jātaka. This fact has been cited in the Astrological work “Jāthaka Alangāram”, Sūtra no.297:

As per this sūtra, if Rāgu stands in Mēsham, Rishabam, Kadagam, Kanni, Maharam, they will obtain Parvatha yōgam.
Moreover, those persons with such jataka position can become great persons and even live like kings.

As per another astrological work called "Jātaka Pārijāṭham", the greatness of Rāgu has been defined as:

Moreover, if Rāgu is present in 3, 6 and 12th positions, he grants Rajayogam.

The nature of Rāgu and Kēthu has been defined in another astrological work called "Māruthu Yogam" as:

According to this sūtra if Rāgu is present in 3, 6 and 12th positions, he grants Rājayogam.

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

Moreover, if Rāgu 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, Ḫndrajalam, Maṇtrajalam and so on.
At the same time, “Rāgu Thōshām” is a contrary character of Rāgu. If any falls under this “thosham” or “affliction” have to undergo lot of troubles and misfortunes. If Rāgu is present in the 7th house of one’s horoscope, it causes the delay in marriage, and if present in the 5th house, it causes childlessness or “Puthira thōshām”.

Hence, to get relieved from these afflictions, special offerings has to be performed to Rāgu so as to appease him. Saint Thirunavukkarasar, while praising the glory of the Lord Thirunāgāswaran Peṟumān, he sung the pious Dēvarām hymn which is cited below:

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

Rāgu thasai lasts for 18 years. To get relieved from the enmities, fears, puthira thōsam, delay in marriage, it has been advised to worship Nāgarāja, Durgā, and to wear ornaments made out of silver with the figure of the Nāgam or serpent, to wear Gōmēthagam (Sardonyx), to offer black gram as charity. Moreover, those afflicted with the 'thōsa' must perform abhishēka to Rāgu, adorning him with black dress, Gōmēthagamani, Neēlamanthārai, Iluppaiflower. The fire pit should be lit with aruganpul and as Neiveithiyam, rice mixed with blackgram power should be offered. After camphor Dipāratana, hymns on Rāgu can be sung in Rāgappiriya tune.

Possessions of Rāgu:

1. Gothiram Baidināsar
2. Favourite deity cow
3. Prathyathi snake
4. Worshipping Lord Durga Serpent/Bandra Kali
5. Authority Nil
6. Direction South west
7. Language Alien Language
8. Caste Sankirāmar
9. Dress Black
10. Consort Simhec
11. Vehicle  Goat
12. Flower  Manthārai
13. Samithu  Arugu
14. Grain  Blackgram
15. Metal  Black Stone
16. Gem  Gōmethagam / Sardonyx
17. Travel period in the Rasi  1.5 years
18. Thasai  18 years
19. Food  Blackgram rice
20. Son  Amutha Kadigam
21. Possession  Gnānakāragan
22. Fortune  3,6 Good fortune
23. Sthalā  Thirunāgeśwaram /
             Kālakaṣṭhī¹⁹

Rāgu : Navagrahā Sthōthiram :

madu ierā mokkam katharam rashmāntakam amūtham samm

mahātre mokkam pukkam pukkam kārā pukkam kārā

bānu ierā mokkam katharam bānu katharam bānu katharam

madhunā ekūndhuk kārā śāṅkam śāṅkam śāṅkam śāṅkam.
Rāgu Bhagavān Thiyāna Sulōgam:

अग्रवर्म कथाम युग्मसन्वधाम
स्रीस्वर ग्रहस्तिः वाहीसत्वधाम
सति कृतकृत्यः सकारस्तु यथात्वधाम

drum gurudhū in pīyathalai m na ṛgum

Rāgu Bhagavān who was born to Simhihai, a great hero with half body with the head, and he who afflicts chandra and Sūrya, I pray you.

Sri Rāgu Sthuthi:

गिरीक्षति बक्ष्यदाम् भर्तुवर्ती वृक्षगामुनिवर्ती म्हरकी
सीतकाम चललस्म पञ्चहिंसके मार्जिकम्
सतिकृत्या वार्तिकाति सतिकृत्या सतिकृत्या कृत्याम्

During the period of delugue, Brahmā, Vishnu, Yama, Kubērā and Īndrā were all destroyed. But because of your noble virtues, O, mother, Sadhā Siva dances with you.

Rāgu: Navagrahā Gāyathiri:

गुरु नवग्रहां गिरीक्षति बक्ष्यदाम् भर्तुवर्ती

drum gurudhū gāyathri
Foot Notes

1. Viswanatha siva charyar, Navagraha Vazhipadu, (Chennai: Kavitha publications, 1999) PP 4-6


3. ibid., P.36

4. ibid., P.39

5. ibid., P.43

6. ibid., P.46

7. A.R.E., 81-84 of 1911

8. A.R.E., 211 – 222 of 1911

9. Sekkizhar Dasan, op.cit., P.54

10. Jathaga Alangaram, VS. 297

11. Jathaga Parijatham, VS. 3

12. Thandava malai, VS.11

13. Pulippani, VS.155


16. ibid., PP61-62


18. ibid., P.189

19. ibid., P.190

20. ibid., P.190