

## CHETTINADU, NAGARATHAR COMMUNITY PEOPLE OF SIVAGANGA DISTRICT - AS SHOWN BY THE INSCRIPTIONAL RECORDS

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### Abstract

*It is the age of journey from fat to fit. Today the whole sea of humanity seems to be on a mission as far as far as food is concerned to turn from fat to fit People are avoiding or fearing fatty food. In this respect chettinadu Nagarather community people's dishes are in confirmity with the above healthy tips. Nowadays the chettinadu dishes are famous not only in India but also in foreign countries. Nagarathar community has a hoary past. This paper tries to trace the history of Nagarathar community of sivaganga District as shown in the inscriptions available in the district Nattukkottai Nagarathar or chettiars, a small trading community people have been playing a significant role in the field of religion and education of the state .<sup>1</sup> These people are believed to have hailed from Chola Nadu to pandya country in 13<sup>th</sup> century which later became the chettinadu. Owing to their wealth and their money - lending business, they have been called 'the Jews of south India'. But the people are having helping tendency and men of charity they are allotting a percentage of their income to temples and other religious activities.<sup>2</sup>*

*Keywords: Nagarather community, chettinadu, sivaganga District, small trading, religious activities, 'Tolkappium' Marayam'*

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his "the Discovery of India" book says about this community. The chettys of Madras have also been leaders in business and banking especially from ancient times. The word 'chetty' is derived from the sanskrit 'shresthi the leader of merchant guild. The common appellation 'Sethu' is also derived from 'Shreshthi' the Madras chettys have not only played an important part in South India. But they spread out all over Burma even in remote villages.<sup>3</sup> Inscriptions regarding Nagarathar not only found in India but also in foreign countries such as Sumatra, Java and Indonesia. In Sumatra at a place called Lobo- Tova an inscription has been discovered. The date of the above is 1088 A.D A set of traders called "திசை ஆயிரத்தைந் நா ற்றுவர்" were existed in Sumatra NanaDesigan a Nagarathar trader accompanied with muscle men conducted foreign trade to safeguarded himself from pirates. Next important inscription Concerning the Nagarathar community is found in Burma at a Place called 'Bagavan.' It says about the trader Nana Desigan. This trader also is mentioned in Mysore inscription. It is called "le; நாற்றுவர் மெய்கீர்த்தி" the word such as "Chetty" and chettyputhiran are found in this inscription.<sup>4</sup>

Near Ilayathankudi, at a place called Melappanayur an inscription is found. It is a temple called 'Gnanapurishvarar' Temple. It describes about the greatness of Nagarathar Community especially their Services to temple construction. The date of this inscription is ascribed to 1360 A.D, exact Tamil Mounth panguni 12<sup>th</sup> day. But it doesnt hears the name of the king ruled during the period.<sup>5</sup> another inscription says about a title called 'Marayam'. The word Marayam is also found in the ancient Tamil Literature 'Tolkappium' Marayam' means a special title. It was awarded by "the kings" to their subjects. It is said that Nagarathar might have received such titles from their Kings.<sup>6</sup> The Melapanaiyur inscription is preserved in Government Museum at Chennai. It starts with the sentence பிலவங்க றீ பங்குனி மீ 10உ பொன்னமறாபதி நாட்டில் வடபத்து பனயர் குளமங்கலத்து ஊரவறோம்.<sup>7</sup> The substance of the inscription is that Ilayathankudi Nagarathar Community People were appointed as jurists in case of any dispute among the Nagarathar villages.

### Sevalur Inscription

Once this village was dominated by Nagarathar community people nowadays these People have migrated to nearly towns. The inscription is found in a temple called Boomiswarar. The date

of the inscription is 1458 AD, Parthiba year in Tamil, month 'Thai'. This inscription says about Nagarathar of Ilayathankudi and kalanivasal in the services of the Temple administration. Another part of the inscription says that the Nagarathar were allotted 30 housing plots in the village by the king of the time. Sevalur is one of the important 96 villages of Nagarathar community in chettinadu.

#### **Irankiam Inscription**

It also says about Ilayathankudi Nagarathar. Irankiam village is considered to be the present day Rajasinga Mangalam. Once this village was dominated by the Nagarathar community people. It is attested by a poem by Muthappa Chettiar."

ராசசிங்கம் வாழிபூமி நாதர் சிவகாமியையும்  
நேசமுடன் போற்றி நிறைந்திருப்போர்"

Rajasinga Mangalam Temple is connected as one of the important temples of Nagarathar. In this temple, at the eastern wall, an inscription is there. The date is mentioned as 1446 A.D. The temple was constructed by kulasekarapurathur Okkuradayan Vanigaramar. The name of the deity is Boomiswarar. Most of the inscriptions of Nagarathar community People say about Ilayathankudi Nagarathar and their Contributions to temples. An inscription at 'Marava Madurai' Ahalangeaswarar Temple near Thirumayam says that Ilayathankudi chettiars created a water tank within the temple complex.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Velankudi Inscription**

Another name for the inscription is "Poonkundrum velankudi chasanarm". It is found in a Siva Temple at velankudi near Thirupathur Sivaganga District. It is considered as one of important inscriptions regarding the history of Nagarathar. Historians are giving more importance to the inscription, while writing history of the People.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Kalayarkoil Inscription**

The date of the inscription is 1511 A.D. In it a sentence about Ilayathankudi Nagarathar is seen. "இளையாத்தங்குடியான் குலசேகரபுரத்துக் களையார் கூவற் பெருந்தெருவில் திரு வேட்டூருடையான்." Hence it is clear that Ilayathankudi People had an intimate relation with kalayarkoil.<sup>10</sup> Nagarathar community People were staunch Hindus. They worshipped Lord Siva and constructed a number of Siva Temples in their villages. They never embraced or converted to Christianity. During 15th and 16th centuries Christian missionaries entered the Marava country from Madurai Mission. But the missionaries could not convert the Nagarathar community People to their faith. But during this period, other communities were converted to the new faith. It is said that the Nagarathar or Nattukkottai Chettiars, since they were the money lenders and business People, they concentrated only on their profession. Above all they were staunch Hindus, hence they refused to be converted into a new religion. Thus Nagarathar People lived a wealthy healthy and pious life in their 96 villages in the present day Sivaganga and Pudukkottai districts. According to their inscriptions, is learnt that the services and sacrifices of the Nagarathar community People to the temples not only helped their people to attain salvation but to all the other people of the area during times of floods, famine and political disturbances. Even today the Nagarathar people are continuing their services to the Hindu temples with full devotion.

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