

# Connection of Valluvar community to Naaga and Shakthi Worship Related to Nainativu Nagapooshani Amman Temple: A Historical Review

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## Introduction

Nayinativu Nagapooshani Amman Temple is an ancient, historic Hindu Temple located on the island of Nainativu, Sri Lanka. It is dedicated to Parvathi who is known as Nagapooshani or Buwaneshwari and her consort; Shiva who is named as Raksheshwar or Nayinar. In this abstract we hope to discuss about the Connection of Valluvar Community in Nayinativu with the Naaga and Shakthi Worship related to Nainativu Nagapooshani Amman Temple.

## Methodology

Primary data from Nayinativu Nagapooshani Amman Temple

Secondary data - University library, EBooks, Websites

Qualitative data – In-Depth Interviews

## Result and Discussions

Historians note that the island of Nayinativu is mentioned in the

ancient Tamil Sangam Literature of nearby Tamil Nadu such as Manimekalai where it was mentioned as ‘Manipallavam’ and ancient Buddhist legends of Sri Lanka such as Mahavamsa. Ptolemy, a Greek cartographer, describes the Tamil territory including islands around the Jaffna peninsula as ‘Nagadibois’ in the first century CE. It is believed that the temple was originally erected many millennia before by the Nagas who were a branch of pre historic race which colonized South India and Ceylon and worshiped Naga God known to the Tamils as ‘Naga-Nayinar’ or simply as ‘Nayinar’. Hence the name ‘Nayinar- Theevu’ (the island of the serpent God) which is now stands corrupted and spelt as ‘Nayinativu’.

This temple is a significant symbol for the Tamil people and it has been mentioned since antiquity in Tamil literature such as Manimekalai, Kundalakesi, Brahmananda Purana and Shakthi Peetha Stotram. Adi

Shankarcharya, a 9<sup>th</sup> century Hindu philosopher mentioned this temple in Shakthi Peetha Stotram as one of the prominent 64 Shakthi Peethams (significant shrines and pilgrimage destinations in Shaktism; goddess focused Hindu tradition) in the Indian Subcontinent. According to Hindu mythology when Vishnu cut the dead body of Mata Suti into 52 body parts, her ornaments and body parts fell on earth to become sacred sites where all the people can pay homage to the Goddess. It is believed that her Silambu (anklet) fell in to the place where Nayinative Amman Temple is situated.

Just north of where this temple stands, there are two 'holy rocks' in the sea about a half-a-kilometer from the north coast of Nayinativu, which are related to a legend that is part of the traditional history of this temple. One rock is called 'Garudan Kal' (the rock of the sea-eagle) and the other rock is known as 'Paambu Sutriya Kal' (the rock around which the cobra wounds itself). It is believed that many centuries ago, a cobra was swimming across the sea towards Nayinativu from the nearby island of Puliyantive with a flower on its mouth to worship Nayinativu Nagapooshani Amman. A sea-eagle spotted the snake and was trying to attack it and kill it. Fearing harm from the sea-eagle, the cobra wound itself around a rock in the sea about a half a kilometer from the Nayinativu coast, and the sea-eagle

stood on another rock some distance away. A merchant from the Chola kingdom who was himself a devotee of Sri Nagapooshani Amman, and who was sailing at that time on his ship close to the above mentioned rocks noticed the eagle and the cobra. He pleaded with the eagle to let the cobra go on its way without any harm. The eagle agreed with one condition that the merchant should construct a beautiful temple for Sri Nagapooshani Amman on the Nayinativu Island. He agreed and built a beautiful temple accordingly. According to another belief, two traders called Manayakan and Mahasathavan have observed a Cobra swimming in the sea with a flower towards the island of Nayinativu. Then the two traders founded a temple in the island of Nayinativu and dedicated it to Ambal. It was rebuilt as a grand temple by Veerasami Chettiar, housed with Ambal and Shiva Deities.

There is an age-old custom prevalent even to this day, among the Thol-Thamilar (people of the Valluvar community) of Nayinativu whose traditional occupation was funeral drumming. They refer to people, whom they show respect as 'Nainaar' for males and 'Naachchiyar' for females. 'Nayinaar' means 'Serpent God'. 'Naachchiyar' would appear to be a corruption of 'Naga- Aachchiyar' which means 'Serpent Goddess'. This custom among the Valluvars is clear the evidence that they have remained

very closely connected to Naga Worship until recently. Further, there is evidence to show that until less than a century ago, most valluvars of Nayinativu lived in the vicinity of the Nayinativu Nagapooshani Amman Temple. There are many plots of land bearing the name 'Paraiyan Kudiiruppu' where traditional drum beaters used to live, close to the temple but no longer belongs to the people of that community. Paraiyan are also known as 'Adi Dravida' which means Ancient Dravidians. Their ancestors may have been direct descendants of the pre-historic Dravidian Nagas.

### Conclusions

It is clear that it was the Valluvars, after Nagas who maintained the traditional serpent worship at Nayinativu for at least some centuries, until it finally gave way to Hindu

& Buddhist religious influence and political influence from outside Nayinativu and merged with both the worship of Shakthi and the worship of Lord Buddha. The credit that belongs to rightfully to the Thol-Thamilar (Valluvar) people must be given to them for securing the retention of Naga Worship alongside the worship of Shakthi in this way at the Nayinativu Nagapooshani Amman temple.

### References

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[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayinativu\\_Nagapooshani\\_Amman\\_Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayinativu_Nagapooshani_Amman_Temple)]