

RAJENDRA CHOLA I: HISTORY

NEWS: PM Modi to visit Tamil Nadu on July 27–28 to attend Rajendra Chola I anniversary

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

PM Modi is to commemorate the 1000th anniversary of Rajendra Chola I's conquest of the Gangetic plains, a triumph that led to the founding of Gangaikonda Cholapuram and its UNESCO World Heritage Shiva temple. This event highlights Rajendra Chola I's peak Chola Empire expansion, including naval dominance in Southeast Asia, and the distinctive Dravidian architectural style exemplified by the temple.

Commemorating Rajendra Chola I's Millenary Conquest

Prime Minister Modi is expected to participate in a function marking the **1000th anniversary (millenary)** of King Rajendra Chola I's conquest of the Gangetic plains. This triumph was symbolized by bringing sacred Ganga water to Tamil Nadu, founding the city of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and constructing the magnificent Gangaikonda Cholisvaram Shiva temple.

About Rajendra Chola I:

- **Successor and Empire's Peak:** He was the son of **Rajaraja I** and took the Chola Empire to its zenith in terms of both military expansion and prestige during his reign (regnal years: **1012–1044 CE**).
- **Military Expansion in the Deccan:**
 - Launched a significant campaign against the **Western Chalukyas**, extending Chola influence northward to the **Tungabhadra River**.
 - Defeated the **Pandys in Madurai**, forcing them to retreat to Sri Lanka, which he subsequently invaded and conquered.
- **The Northern Expedition and Its Impact:**
 - Undertook a remarkable military expedition to **North India**.
 - Defeated the **Pala king Mahipala of Bengal**, the **Kalinga ruler**, and several other northern chieftains.
 - His victories are extensively documented in various historical sources, including the **Tiruvalangadu, Esalam, Karanthai, Tirukkalar Copper Plates**, numerous inscriptions, and ancient Tamil literary works.
 - **Symbolic Ganga Water:** Tradition holds that the vanquished kings were compelled to carry sacred **Ganga water** on their heads back to the new Chola capital. This water was then ritually poured into the artificial lake named "**Chola Gangam**" (which is now known as Ponneri).
 - **War Trophies:** Rajendra Chola I also brought back **Chalukya and Kalinga sculptures** as spoils of war.
- **Naval and Maritime Achievements:**

- Led a highly successful **naval expedition** against the powerful **Sri Vijaya kingdom** (located in present-day Sumatra). This campaign solidified Chola dominance over the crucial Southeast Asian maritime trade routes.
- His maritime victories significantly **boosted trade** relations with the Malay Peninsula and other parts of Southeast Asia.
- **Titles:** He assumed several prestigious titles reflecting his conquests and wisdom:
 - **Mudikonda Cholan** (the Crowned Chola)
 - **Kadaramkondan** (Conqueror of Kadaram, which refers to Kedah in modern-day Malaysia)
 - **Pandita Cholan** (the Learned Chola)
 - **Gangaikonda Cholan** (the Chola who conquered the Ganga)

Gangaikonda Cholapuram:

- **Background:** Following his triumphant northern expedition, Rajendra Chola I adopted the celebrated title '**Gangaikonda Cholan**' ("the Chola who conquered the Ganga").
- **Establishment of the Capital:** He founded the city of **Gangaikonda Cholapuram** in present-day Ariyalur district, **Tamil Nadu**, around **1025 CE**. This strategically important city then served as the **imperial capital of the Cholas until 1279 CE**.
- **Architectural Significance:** As part of his new capital, he constructed the magnificent **Gangaikondacholeeswaram Temple**, dedicated to Lord Shiva. This temple was designed to mirror the grandeur and architectural style of the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur, built by his father.
- **Urban Planning:** Gangaikonda Cholapuram was conceived as a **planned urban centre**, complete with fortifications, royal palaces, and well-laid-out streets. Inscriptions from the reign of Kulottunga I (dated to his 49th regnal year – **1119 AD**) specifically mention the existence of multiple royal buildings within the city.
- **Cultural and Political Importance:** The city functioned as a vital **political, commercial, and cultural hub** throughout the Chola period. It served as a powerful symbol of the vast Chola empire, which stretched from the Tungabhadra River in the north down to Sri Lanka in the south.
- **Literary References:** The city's prominence is attested in various Tamil literary works:
 - **Muvar Ula** by Ottakuttar provides descriptions of the citadel.
 - **Rajaraja Cholan Ula** lists various landmarks within the city.
 - **Kalingattuparani** refers to the city specifically as **Gangapuri**.

Gangaikondacholeeswaram Temple:

- **Commissioned by:** The temple was commissioned by **Rajendra Chola I** (r. 1014–1044 CE), the illustrious son of Rajaraja Chola I.

- **Principal Deity:** It is dedicated to **Lord Shiva**, whose worship is centered around a monumental **13-foot tall Shiva Lingam** enshrined in the sanctum.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** This temple is recognized as one of the “**Great Living Chola Temples**”, alongside the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram. All three are inscribed as **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, celebrated for their outstanding architectural achievements and profound cultural significance.
- **Temple Structure:**
 - The **vimana (main tower)** is a prominent feature, rising impressively to a height of **55 metres** and constructed on an elevated platform.
 - The spacious **courtyard** measures **170 m in length and 98 m in width**, adorned with elaborate sculptures and carvings.
 - The temple is richly decorated with **exquisite stone carvings**, serving as a testament to the advanced artistic and engineering prowess characteristic of the Chola period.
- **Symbolism:** The temple stands as a powerful **symbol of imperial Chola power and their deep devotion**. It represents the **peak of Dravidian temple architecture** and the Chola dynasty’s unwavering commitment to grand temple construction.
- **Inscriptions:** Interestingly, **no inscription by Rajendra Chola I himself** has been discovered within the temple. Knowledge of his direct role in its construction primarily comes from the inscriptions of his son, **Vira Rajendra**, who referred to the palace nearby as **Chola-Keralan Thirumaaligai**.



Dravidian Style of Temple Architecture:

- **Evolution and Patronage:** The Dravidian style of temple architecture evolved and flourished predominantly in **South India** from approximately the **8th century to the 13th–14th century CE**. It received significant patronage from powerful dynasties such as the **Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, and Vijayanagar rulers**.
- **Key Architectural Features:**
 - **Enclosure:** Dravidian temples are characteristically surrounded by **high boundary walls**, which clearly demarcate the sacred space from the secular world outside. A notable example is the Sriranganathar Temple at Srirangam (Tiruchirappalli), which features **seven concentric rectangular walls**, each adorned with towering gopurams, with the sanctum sanctorum at its very center.
 - **Gopuram:** The **monumental entrance gateway**, known as the **gopuram**, is a hallmark of this style. It is built directly into the front wall and, over time, evolved to become the most prominent and ornate architectural element of the entire temple complex, often dwarfing the main shrine.
 - **Vimana (Main Tower):** The **vimana** is a distinctive **stepped, pyramidal structure** that rises directly over the sanctum (garbhagriha). This multi-storied, tapering design is a key differentiator from the curvilinear *shikhara* found in the Nagara style of North Indian temple architecture.
 - **Panchayatan Layout:** Temple complexes frequently adhere to the **panchayatan style**, which involves a central, primary shrine surrounded by **four smaller, subsidiary shrines** located at each of the corners.
 - **Temple Tank:** The presence of a **water tank or a large temple pond** within the enclosure is a unique and distinctive feature of Dravidian temples, used for ritual purification and other sacred purposes.
 - **Temple Towns:** Prominent centers where Dravidian temple architecture reached its zenith and around which entire towns developed include **Kanchipuram, Thanjavur (Tanjore), Madurai, and Kumbakonam**.

Source: <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-to-visit-tamil-nadu-on-july-27-28-to-attend-rajendra-chola-i-anniversary/>