

PLACE OF TOURIST INTEREST IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Thanjavur has its significance and glory from the very ancient days. The place is made mention not only in Puranas, Epics and even Sangam literary works as a pilgrim center. Thanjavur known for its ancient language and rich cultural tradition has numerous places of tourism interest for people belonging to other parts of the country and also other nations. Tourism is a highly developed economic activity and it is very useful for all countries, particularly the underdeveloped ones. It is also for this reason that the central and state governments in India are taking a keen interest in the promotion of tourism. The numerous temples located all over the Thanjavur also have varied historical significance. Tourism is one of the major industries in the world and as a result, there is a growing awareness of the need to manage it effectively. The home of Carnatic music, musical instruments dance and traditional handicrafts, Thanjavur is famous for the Brahadeswarar temple which is a world heritage site. The Temple constructed more than a thousand years ago by the Chola King Raja, Raja is an architectural marvel. The Brahadeeswarar temple, called the Big Temple, is dedicated to Lord Siva. It was built by the great Chola King Raja Raja (A.D. 985- 1012). It is an outstanding example of Chola architecture. Beautiful Chola fresco paintings adorn the inner walls of the Temple. The Airavatheeswarar of Darasuram temple built by Raja Raja Chola II (Rajendra Chola) is an example of twentieth-century Chola architecture and is well preserved even to this day. The frontal columns of the temple have unique miniature sculptures. Sri Swaminatha Swamy Temple is built on an artificial Swamimalai, a small town near Kumbakonam. Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Mahal Library is one among the few libraries in the world with texts of the medieval period. It is a treasure house of knowledge carefully fostered and nurtured by successive dynasties of Nayakas and the Marathas of Thanjavur.

KEY WORDS : Puranas – Epics - Cultural tradition - Pilgrim center - Economic activity – Promotion - Carnatic music – Traditional handicrafts - Brahadeswarar temple - Raja Raja - Serfoji's Mahal - Chola architecture - Nayakas - Marathas

Introduction:

India is a country with a variety of customs and conventions, civilizations and religions and has something to show and offer to everyone. It is colourful crowded bazaars contrasting with the peace and grandeur of the snowcapped mountain tops. The quiet backwaters of Kerala and their beautiful beaches, and above all her well-meaning charming people these are a few of the countless facets of India which are timeless in their appeal. Tourism means the business of providing information, transportation, accommodation and other services to travelers.¹ Travel and tourism industry is made up of companies that provide services to all types of travelers whether traveling for business or pleasure. Tourism moves people from one region of the world to another. It may be said to be a 'dream machine', it helps to realize a dream or fantasy in the tourists for the otherwise toilsome life. Tourism is a highly developed economic activity and it is very useful for all countries, particularly the underdeveloped ones.² It is also for this reason that the central and state governments in India are taking a keen interest in the promotion of tourism.

Tourism in Thanjavur :

The development of tourism in a country helps to increase the national income, generate employment opportunities. Thanjavur, one of the 38 districts in Tamil Nadu, is commonly known as the 'Rice Bowl' of the Tamil Nadu. Thanjavur is also the headquarters of the district of the same name and it is situated on the southeast coast of Tamil Nadu State. The composite Thanjavur district is bifurcated and later trifurcated and now we have Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagappatinam Districts. The district lies on the East coast of Tamil Nadu. It is situated between 9.50' and 11.25' of the northern Latitude and 78.45' and 79.25' of the Eastern Longitude.³ The district is bounded in the North by the Coleroon which separates it from Perambalur and Tiruchirappalli districts and in the East, it is bounded by Thiruvarur and Nagappattinam districts and on the south by the Palk Strait Pudukkottai district and on the west by Pudukkottai and Tiruchirappalli districts. There are no hills in the district. The district being predominantly agricultural is called the Granary of the South. Thanjavur known for its ancient language and rich cultural tradition has numerous places of tourism interest for people belonging to other parts of the country and also other nations. Tourism in Tamil Nadu has flourished since ancient times.

During the glorious days of Chera, Chola, and Pandiya, the three kingdoms of Tamil Nadu, people from different parts of the world had visited the land to take part in religious-cultural celebrations like the 'Indira Vizha.' The widespread trade relations with many countries which date back to 5000 years in history also contributed to the spread of the social-cultural progress and economic prosperity of the people of the land.⁴ The numerous temples located all over the Thanjavur also have varied historical significance. Tourism is one of the major industries in the world and as a result, there is a growing awareness of the need to manage it effectively. Tourism is not a single business but it involves many industries and a whole range of complex activities. To have a comprehensive practical programme and to derive the desired fruits of its implementation evaluation of various factors and elements in the tourism industry in India has to be made. Tourism has much scope for development and the development of tourism can develop certain localities, states and even countries. The largest industry in Thanjavur is tourism which makes it all the more surprising that only a handful of research has been carried out into the operation and management of that industry. The home of Carnatic music, musical instruments dance and traditional handicrafts, Thanjavur is famous for the Brahadeswarar temple which is a world heritage site. The temple constructed more than a thousand years ago by the Chola King Raja, Raja is an architectural marvel.⁵

Historic Spiritual Centres:

The Brahadeeswarar temple, called the Big Temple, is dedicated to Lord Siva. It was built by the great Chola King Raja Raja (A.D. 985- 1012). It is an outstanding example of Chola architecture. Recognizing its unique architectural excellence, UNESCO has declared it a World Heritage Monument. The 64.8-meter tall vimanam (tower over sanctum sanctorum) is testimony to the engineering skill of the Cholas in keeping with the size of the temple. It has a gigantic "Mahalingam" in the shrine, measuring 4 meters in height.⁶ A monolithic Nandhi chiseled out of a single rock, measures 5.94 meters in length, 2.51 meters in-breath and 3.66 meters in height. It is the second-largest Nandhi in India. The Nandhi or bull is the vehicle of Lord Siva. Beautiful Chola fresco paintings adorn the inner walls of the Temple. One of the outstanding temples in South India, the Brahadeeswarar temple is the Chola dynasty's finest contribution to Dravidian temple architecture.⁷

What makes the construction so unique is the variation from the usual temple building style of having a tall gopuram and a smaller vimanam. At the Big Temple, the vimanam soars high while the gopuram is smaller. The 64.8m tall, 14 tier pyramid-shaped vimanam raised from a square base is topped by a huge monolithic cupola carved from an 81.3-tonne block of granite. It was raised with the aid of a 6 km-long inclined plane. Punnainallur Mariamman Temple dedicated to Goddess Mariamman was built by Maratha ruler Tulajaji A.D. 1677.⁸ The two

Temples, Brahmasirekandeeswarar temple and the Harasapavimochanam Perumal Temple are located here. It is one of the Attaveeratta Sthalangal. Thiruppalayam is a small village 8 km away from Thiruvaiyaru situated along the Thiruvaiyaru – Kumbakonam bus route Thingalur is a hamlet 1.5 km south of Thiruppalanam. Further, a crescent is said to adorn the main lingam of this temple this way also be the cause of the name Thingalur. It is attended by above 1000 devotee districts every day. Thingalur is one of the Navagraha temples Chandran Moon is the separate abode.⁹ Papanasam temple occupies an important place in temple art. It is one of the major silk weaving in the State. The other is the 108 Sivalayam temples which have 108 Sivalingms. The Sivalinga here was worshipped by Rama and Seeta for the abduction of their sins. The granary constructed by the Nayaks (1600-1634) is a grand sight. The State Archaeological Department has declared it a monument. Navarathiri is an annual which is attended by about 1000 devotees. Arulmighu Mullaivanathar and Karpagarakshambigai temple are situated in the river bed of Vettaru a branch of Cauvery, at a distance of 20 km, North-East from Thanjavur and at a distance of 20 km, southwest from Kumbakonam.¹⁰

Thirukarugavoor is of age-old greatness and extensively sung by the Great Saiva Saints Thirugnana Sambandar and Thirunavukkarasar on the presiding deities God Eswara Mullaivananathar and Goddesses Karpagarakshambigai, protecting the fetus of the one and all devotees, who pray her with all sincere devotion. The Iyavatheeswarar of Darasuram temple built by Raja Raja Chola II (Rajendra Chola) is an example of twentieth-century Chola architecture and is well preserved even to this day. The frontal columns of the temple have unique miniature sculptures. Darasuram is also a silk weaving center. UNESCO declared this as a heritage site. Sri Naganantha Swamy temple (Sri Rahu abode) is an ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which is located at Thirunageswaram 7 km east of Kumbakonam.¹¹ It is believed that Rahu Bhagavan (one of the nine orbiting planets of the sun) absolved his curse by worshipping the Lord here. One can see the rare Rahu Bhagavan idol with his consorts in this temple. Devotees perform milk abishekam to get rid of their Rahu dosham or its evil effects. During the time of the abishekams when the milk is poured on Rahu idol, the milk turns bluish in colour to the eyes of the devotees. Annually this temple is attended by about 5000 devotees. Thiruvaiyaru is situated on the banks of the Cauvery. Thiruvaiyaru has an old Siva temple dedicated to Panchanatheeswarar. Pilgrims flock to this temple throughout the year. Thiruvaiyaru is renowned for its association with Saint Thyagaraja, who along with Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Shyama Sastri constitute the Trinity of Carnatic Music.¹² Thyagaraja Aaradhana is held in January at the “Samadhi” of the saint-poet on the riverbanks. Exponents of Carnatic music come to Thiruvaiyaru and perform during the ‘aaradhana’ to pay homage to Thyagaraja.

Swamimalai Temple

Sri Swaminatha Swamy Temple is built on an artificial Swamimalai, a small town near Kumbakonam. The hill temple has sixty steps coinciding with the Tamil years. The presiding deities are life images of Muruga and Siva the son importing the divine message “Pranava” to his father. Sri Swaminatha Swamy is in six feet high granite idol in a standing posture offering a spectacular view to devotees this temple is one of the six abodes (Arupadaiveedu) of Lord Murugan on the way to Swamimalai a famous Vinayaga temple is located in Thiruvalanjuli village where the Vinayaga idol is in white colour. The main festivals are *Karthikai*, *Thai Pongal* more than 2000 local devotees attend them.¹³

Ayrvatheeswarar Temples

Sri Ayrvatheeswarar temple known for architectural skill is located in Darasuram near Kumbakonam and was built by Rajendra Chola. Famous icons have been discovered during recent renovations and this temple is a protected monument under the control of the Archeological Survey of India. Darasuram the Iyrvatheeswara of Darasuram temple built by Raja Raja Chola (Rajendra Chola) is an example of 12th century Chola architecture and is well preserved even to this day the frontal columns of the temple have unique miniature sculptures Darasuram is also a silk weaving center which attracts more than 1000 of devotees from all over India and other countries. Sarangapani temple is also located near to big bazaar of Kumbakonam. It is considered one among the three major shrines of Lord Vishnu and it was renovated during the period of Nayaka kingdom of sixteenth-century Sarangapani temple consists of the biggest Gopuram (150 ft) and five Praharas and one holy tank, known as ‘Porthamarai Kulam’ which is located behind the temple. The Karuvurai and Vimanam are made off of 12 sculptures columns shaped like a chariot. This temple has a big chariot. The chariot rounds the four-car streets once a year. This is celebrated by the people in and around the town. Nageswaran temple otherwise known as ‘Koothandavar Kovil’ is located near the old bus stand area. Adhithya Cholan of the Chola dynasty constructed this temple during the twelfth century.¹⁴ This temple stands as a great marvel of Chola’s architecture, building technology and astronomy.

The design and orientation are designed and structured in such a way that it allows the sun rays inside the temple and reflected on the “God Siva” only during the month of Chithirai (May-June) therefore, it bears another name called “Sooriya Kottam” or “Keel Kottam”, the Karuvurai (Room of God) of Nageswaran temple has similarity with that of Sarangapani temple, as it is in the form of a chariot. The temple consists of two Gopurams in the Eastern and Western directions. Achutha Nayaka of Thanjavur constructed the Ramasamy temple during the

sixteenth century. This temple is located on the southwestern portion of “porthamarai kulam” this temple consists of one Gopuram, one Maha Mandapam and Karuvarai.¹⁵ The columns of Maha Mandapam are enriched with intricate stone carving works of the story of Lord Rama. Vamana Avatharam, Meenakshi Kalyanam, Sugreeva Pattabishekam are some of the famous carving works of this temple. The outer prahara consists of a 219 wall painting, which explains the series of incidents from the great Epic “Ramayanam”. Sooriyanar Kovil is one of the Navagraha temples dedicated to lord Suriyan (Sun) it is 58 km from Thanjavur large number of people worship the sun God here. Sooriyanar Kovil is in a village two km north of Aduthurai in Thanjavur district this village is famous for its sun temple perhaps the only one in Tamil Nadu dedicated to the sun. Sun was called by many different names such as Suryapusan, Bhanga Varuna, Vishnu, Aryaman, Virasavan and Amsuman. This Temple is falling west with a three-tier Rajagopuram (tower) nearly 60 feet in height. Poondi Matha Basilica in Poondi village is a Roman Catholic Pilgrim Centre like Velankanni. It attracts pilgrims from all over India. Accommodation is provided to the pilgrims by the Church authorities.¹⁶

Historic Monuments:

Just one km away from the Brahadeeswarar temple is a magnificent palace, surrounded by huge fort walls. Dating back to the fourteenth century A.D. it was built partly by the Nayaks and partly by the Marathas. The Maratha royal family resides in this palace. It is a fascinating building with huge corridors, spacious halls, decorated rooms, tall observation towers, beautiful stucco works, wonderful fresco-painted walls and ceilings, an underground tunnel and intricate carvings.¹⁷ The Royal family’s sacred “Chandramauleeshwarar Temple” is located within the palace walls. The art gallery has a fabulous collection of bronze icons, stone sculptures and pieces of art. The collection is unique for its large representation of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, myths and legends. The exhibits are priceless for their historical association. There is a famous granary of Nayak Dynasty which can store about 1500 bags of paddy and is a protected monument of Archaeological Department and is situated in Sri Palaivananathar Swamy temple in Thirupalathurai village 15 km, South West Kumbakonam. The granary constructed by the Nayaks (A.D. 1600 – 1634) is a grand sight.¹⁸ This State Archaeological Department has been declared as a monument. It was built by the stone of line.

Saraswathi Mahal Library

Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji’s Mahal Library is one among the few libraries in the world with texts of the medieval period. It is a treasure house of knowledge carefully fostered and nurtured by successive dynasties of Nayakas and the Marathas of Thanjavur. It contains a valuable collection of manuscripts, books, maps and

paintings on all aspects of Art, Culture and Literature. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, in its survey of the Libraries of the world, describes it as “the most remarkable Library in India”. This Library was made Public Library in 1918. Also in the palace is the Sangeetha Mahal, an acoustically perfect music hall. It is a striking example of the engineering skill of ancient builders. The Royal Museum and Serfoji Memorial Hall are located in the palace complex, it displays rare antiques belonging to the Maratha Royal Family. The artifacts, manuscripts, weapons, royal robes and handicrafts made out of ivory, jade, lacquer, glass, porcelain, wood, cloth and leather are worth seeing.¹⁹

Sharjah Madi

This is in the eastern part of the palace, built in the Saracen style by King Serfoji after his return from Varanasi. It is six-storied and well known for its ornamental balconies. Its spacious halls bespeak the grandeur of this palace. It enables the tourists to have a panoramic view of Thanjavur City.²⁰ It is the southern part of Thanjavur. It was built during the 8th World Tamil Conference in 1995. This Manimandapam has a museum on its ground floor.

Rajagopala Cannon:

This is huge cannon is placed at the eastern gate of the Fort. The place is called ‘Beerangi Medu’. The Cannon is amazing in size and the quality speaks of the metallurgical knowledge of the people of those times. The Beerangi is the biggest in India. Tholkappiyar Sadukkam (Square) was built during the 8th World Tamil Conference. One can have a panoramic View of Thanjavur town from the tower.

Tamil University:

Established here in 1981, Tamil University is engaged in research and advanced studies in Tamil. It is devoted to the cause of promoting Tamil literature and language. It enables advanced studies in Tamil like Literature, Grammar, Linguistics, Religion and Philosophy, Manuscriptology, History, Epigraphy, Sociology, Folklore, Anthropology, Arts, Sculpture, Music, Drama, Legal Studies, Administration, Science, Engineering, Computer Science, Medical Science, Encyclopedia and Adult Education.²¹

Thanjavur Art Plate

Thanjavur art plate is the traditional metal craft of Tamil Nadu with its intricate workmanship and value. The popular Thanjavur art plates feature designs of deities, birds, flowers and geometric patterns, beaten out from the back of copper and silver sheets. These are then encrusted on a brass round plate, tray, or pot (Kudam) or cup (Panchapathra). Generally, the designs follow a theme, mythological or non-religion and sometimes special motifs

on the requirement.²² Nowadays apart from brass wooden bases, they are covered with transparent vinyl rounds. Usually, the art plates are made in the round shape of wall hangings or mounted on wooden bases in a variety of ways, extensively used as mementos or giveaways. These wooden bases are also made in the shape of a temple tower or floral shape. They are most popularly used as government mementos.

Grand Anicut

Karikala Cholan (second century A.D.) initiated the construction of the Grand Anicut by raising flood banks in the River Cauvery to irrigate the wasteland beside the river. This ancient dam consists of a solid mass of rough stone and clay, stretching across the River Cauvery. It is a fine picnic spot.

Manora

Manora is situated on the shores of the Bay of Bengal in Sarabendrarajanpattinam village, about 20 km south of Pattukottai Town. Manora is a grand old town with lovely architecture and scenic surroundings. Manora is a memorial (Fort) tower built in 1814 A.D by Raja Serfoji of Thanjavur, in commemoration of the victory of the British army over Napoleon Bonaparte, the French emperor, in the historic “Battle of Waterloo” Manora is a pleasing blend of Roman Pillar architecture.²³ The sea, the breeze and the fisherman’s houses make Manora a nice place to visit.

Conclusion:

Thanjavur has its significance and glory from the very ancient days. The place is made mention not only in Puranas, Epics and even Sangam literary works as a pilgrim center. The tourism plan should indicate the short-term and long-term plans, targets and ground realities prevailing in Thanjavur district. The plan should indicate all activities to be undertaken by different agencies indicating the time frame for each activity. The plan should be able to assess the existing tourism scenario in Thanjavur district concerning existing traffic levels and inventory. The local people in the tourist spot of Thanjavur should be made to participate in the planning and development of tourism so that they can bring new ideas, support and influence the decisions, and in turn, be a part of it. Since tourism can yield positive results in the Thanjavur district, and it satisfies the requirements of sustainable eco-development, it should be managed scientifically and gainfully. Otherwise, it poses problems. To contain such problems, tourism should be developed gradually over time so that the society can adapt to it, get educated, participate and enjoy the change.

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