

# ARUNACHALESWARAR TEMPLE AT TIRUVANNAMALAI (TAMILNADU) – AN INSCRIPTIONAL STUDY

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The Arunachaleswarar temple seems to have grown around a spot where a divine power was felt in the hoary past but particularly by the 7th century CE. It is situated at a equi-distance to the west of Gingee, south of Takkolam, east of Sengam and north of Polur. This place occupies a position favourable to a continuous urban development. The very location of this place between the hill and plain was considered conducive for the later day military operations at least from the 15th century upto the end of the Mysore wars.

The present day temple of Arunachaleswara had its origin in a small shrine, obviously the earliest part of the temple. A number of inscriptions found around the basement of this shrine confirm that it is the oldest structure in the temple. After some ten centuries of construction and enlargement, the temple today forms a large rectangle, 465 metre long and 225 metre wide. The 100 – and more inscriptions found in the temple attest to the fact that it was patronized by the Pandyas, Cholas, the later Pallavas, Banas and the Rastrakuta rulers. However, the role played by the Cholas in the reconstruction and renovation of the temple is largely known from most of the inscriptions.

The earliest Chola inscription is found on the west wall of the central shrine of the Arunachaleswarar temple. It belongs to the Chola ruler Parantaka I datable to CE 9221 . Following this, another inscription of Krishna III, a Rashtrakuta ruler is found on the south Wall of the same shrine. It indicates their short sway over this area. However, both these inscriptions throw light on the donation of sheep and cows respectively to the temple, for its maintenance. In the south wall of first prakara (enclosure) of the temple, one could see an inscription of King Rajendra I dated CE 10302 . Another inscription of the same ruler dated 1031 CE is found on the same place and records a gift of land, gold and 336 sheep for the purpose of lamps to be burnt around the Srivimana at night<sup>3</sup> . These two inscriptions bring to light the completion of the first prakara and vimana of the temple by CE 1031 under the rule of Rajendra I.

**Key Words:** Temples, Inscription, Chola's Rules, architecture and sculpture.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The present second prakara was built in two parts: the most ancient is the western portion, where there are numerous inscriptions are etched beginning from CE 1030 – CE 1040. A second partial enclosure wall was then added on its eastern side certainly before the end of 12th century. In its courtyard, several structures were added during the 12th and 13th centuries. The south wall of the fourth prakara might have been built during the period of Kulothunga III in 1181 CE, whose period witnessed the enlargement of the temple by adding a Gopura of the temple (4). The part of the fourth and fifth enclosure must have been designed under the rule of Ballala III (1291 – 1342 CE), who attached his name to the eastern gateway of

the fourth enclosure. The fifth huge enclosure and its great gateways, the 1000 pillared hall were constructed and renovated under the Nattukkottai Chettiars in the beginning of the 20th century.

The simple temple structure in the beginning became a complex structure due to the additions made by the different dynasties such as the Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas and Banas. However, the Cholas overwhelmingly contributed to the enlargement and development of the temple. Even among the Chola rulers, the inscriptions of Parantaka I (CE 922), Aditya II (CE 968), Rajendra I (CE 1031), Rajadhiraja I (CE 1050), Vikrama Chola (CE 1128), Kulothunga I (CE 1136), Rajaraja II (CE 1159), Rajadhiraja II (CE 1167), Kulothunga III (CE 1180), Rajaraja III (CE 1221) and Rajendra III (CE 1251) are found in the temple.

The existence of territorial divisions such as Nenmali – nadu, Tiruvanna – nadu, Chirranpiluyur – nadu, Adaiyur – nadu under Madhurantaka – Valanadu, Tiruvalundur – nadu under Uyyakandar – Valanadu, and Arunolideva – Valanadu are found in the inscriptions of Rajendra I. His successors Rajadhiraja I and Rajadhiraja II had created similar divisions under their rule. Tiruvuraiyur – nadu, a sub division of Kshatriyasigamani – Valanadu and Vesalippadi – nadu were formed under Rajadhiraja I and Rajadhiraja II respectively. The king Kulothunga III, whose rule lasted for more than two decades left an unperishable imprint on the development of the temple. Under his rule, a number of sub - divisions were created, which included Palkunrakkottam, Puramalai – nadu, Tagada – nadu, Pangala – nadu, Perumur – nadu, Muraisur – nadu, Sengunra – nadu, Eyil – nadu and Senalur – nadu. King Rajaraja III created Meykunra – nadu in CE 1233 and Tiruvennainallur – nadu in CE 1237. The above divisions find expression in their inscriptions.

In addition to the general administration of the empire, the Chola rulers focussed their attention on the administration of the temples as well. As socio-economic and religious activities were intertwined with each other, the ruler's attention in this regard became inevitable. In this connection, it is relevant to point out that shepherds (manradis) and the weavers (kaikkolas) held responsible positions in the service of the temple. The sheep frequently donated and referred to in the inscriptions were immediately handed over to shepherds for their upkeep and regular supply of milk and ghee for the daily pujas in the temple. An inscription of Aditya II (968 – 9 CE) registers a gift of 96 sheep by a merchant of Kudal for burning a lamp in the temple of Tiruvannamalai Andar. The sheep were taken charge by the shepherds of Tiruvannamalai<sup>5</sup>. Another inscription of Aditya records a gift of 20 kalanju of gold for the upkeep of the tank (eri) at Puliyur – nadu Chaturvedimangan<sup>6</sup>. The people of Adaiyur, Choriyur, Maichcharrur, Mattur and Kulakkudi sold their lands for 40 kalanju of gold and donated them for feeding in the Rajendracholan – salai attached to the Tiruvannamalai temple<sup>7</sup>. For bathing the deity with 1000 pots full of water, the seven members of nagarattar entered into an agreement to render 32 kalanju of gold to the temple<sup>8</sup>. Under the rule of Rajadhiraja I in CE 1058, an inscription registers an agreement reached with the headman to supply the sandal paste, out of the two kalanju of gold received from one Arangan, the servant of the king<sup>9</sup>. An inscription of Kulottunga III dated CE 1183 throws light on the supply of cloth for the flag (tirukkodipudavai) by one Danmavaniyar on all the festival days of the temple<sup>10</sup>. The gifts of gold ornaments are also mentioned in his inscriptions dated CE 1192. The above donations clearly indicate that the various religious functions of the temple were being supported by the general public through which the economy of the temple was strengthened.

Some of the inscriptions throw light on the role played by women in the religious functions of the temple. When the tank belonging to Narpattenayira Pillai and Mangaiyarkarasi breached and subsequently the lands became fallow, one Tondaima – Nachiyar, daughter of Kangaiyar repaired the bund and provided the sluice to the tank at Srimahesvaranallur and brought the lands under cultivation<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, a gift of 600 kuli (a land measure) of land was registered to the temple in the name of one Nilammai for her merit and welfare<sup>12</sup>. To provide a lamp in the temple, one Komaluvalli, daughter of Kulathulan, an officer in the

service of the temple, gifted 120 sheeps<sup>13</sup>. Another inscription of Kulottunga III has highlighted the donation of 10 kalanju (weight measurement of gold) of gold, one veli of land and a pedestal brass lamp by Devu, a dancing girl of the temple for the merit of her mother, named Vembin<sup>14</sup>. However, the inscription also records a royal order addressed to the trustees (tanattar) of the temple asking them to register the remission of the taxes and to make an entry in the appropriate registers, so that the benefits accorded to the devaradiyars should remain as such without any change in future. The temples employed devaradiyars to sing and dance in front of the deity whenever it was required and specifically during the festival times. They were honoured with titles and donations by the rulers.

Most of the inscriptions have highlighted either the imposition of taxes or remission of taxes. The major revenue of the empire seems to be from the land. The rate of land tax was fixed depending upon the nature of land. In this connection, an inscription of Rajaraja III is found relevant. It registers an agreement between temple officers and the accountant in respect of some lands and its 1/3 of produce as offerings to the temple. However, it stipulated that the taxes levied on the lands were to be at the rate of a nali (liquid measure) per kuli (land measurement) along with the padikkaval (dues paid for Police duties) for the first year of cultivation since reclamation at one fourth of the full rate for the next year and from the third year at three eights of the full rate and padikkaval yielding 80 kalam (a grain measure equal to 13 marakkal used all over the Chola empire) per veli<sup>15</sup> (land measurement).

In addition to the tax on land and agriculture, there were a number of taxes levied on people practicing different vocations. An inscription of Kulottunga III (CE 1198) refers to taxes such as padikkaval, tariyirai (tax on looms), tattarpattam (tax on goldsmith), alamanji (compulsory labour for the maintenance of irrigation tanks), kurrattendam (punishment for crime), pattittendam (fine imposed by cattle boundaries) and echchoru<sup>16</sup> (meals offered to people who involved in public works during day time). However, Rajendra III's (CE 1251) inscriptions throw light on taxes such as vetti (free labour for public works), taniyal, eriminpattam (income from the sale of fish in the tank), ponvari (tax on gold), mavadai and maravadai (enjoyment of fruit bearing trees) which are different from that of Kulottunga III<sup>17</sup>.

The successful implementation of the temple functions definitely depends upon the efficiency of the officers of the temple. In this connection the danattar (charity giver), devakanmi (one of the major brahmin group members associated with the temple administration), koyilkanakkar (temple accountant), kankani (superintendent) and danapadi (chief charity giver) constitute the authorities of the temple administration.

Swayed and immensely impacted by the Bhakthi movement which ruled the spiritual and religious domain from the 6th century to 14th century CE in the Tamil country, there was a significant increase in temple building activities in the region. The imperial Chola epoch, having been compelled to promote ritual polity that perpetuated religious rituals as well as part of their sustainable activity, had built, patronized and encouraged temple building efforts on a large scale with a well-structured temple administration. The Arunachaleswarar temple at Tiruvannamalai is one such endeavour of the Chola kings during their period. This temple is a marvellous treasure of art, architecture and sculpture built in unique style.

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