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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**MONUMENTS HERITAGE OF ARIYALUR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GANGAIKONDA  
CHOLAPURAM**

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**Abstract**

Heritage is a continuation of human past which includes the habits, practices, culture, and character of the humanity. It is a product of thousands of years, dynasty to dynasty. It was a city under the rule of imperial Cholas. The imperial Chola capital of Thanjavur during the Cholas period. These dynasties have enriched the Socio-Cultural, monumental heritage of Ariyalur. The monumental heritage of Ariyalur highlights the special reference of Gangai konda Cholapuram. Further studies can be carried out in the all monuments of Ariyalur. The monuments of this area are protected by various efforts of Government and other organization. So it is need of the hour to create awareness among the people. As Ariyalur is an important tourist centre the tourism infrastructure should also be improved which can contribute to the overall development.

**Introduction**

Ariyalur district one of the historical and traditional district of Tamilnadu. It came into existence by the bifurcation (19.11.2007) of Perambalur district. It is bounded on the north by Cuddalore south by Thanjavur east by Cuddalore and Thanjavur west by Perambalur and Trichy districts. The area comprising of the present day Ariyalur district remained under the rule of the Imperial Cholas from the beginning of their rule to the end. Ample opportunities

are available in Ariyalur district to witness these marvelous artistic features. Ariyalur is a blend of history and traditions as well as a pilgrim centre and a thriving commercial city. The district has many important places including temples which attract many people all over the world. A part from this true picnic spots and tourist centers are a bound with natural beauty and other famous places of worship of the minorities' museums also here now. However many of the temples in the district are noted for their antiquity or architectural value of present Ariyalur district.

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### **Jayankondam**

The original name of this place was Nellimanagaram as the sacred tree in the local Siva Temple is country gooseberry (Nellimaram) tree. The present name is said to have been given by Rajendra Chola before he shifted his capital to Gangaikonda cholapuram. Jayankondam is 10kms. from Gangaikonda cholapuram. The nearest railway station is Sendurai or Ariyalur.

### **Ariyalur**

Ariyalur region has been laden with history, temples, art and architecture and nature's boon. It is dotted with villages immersed in mythology and rich traditions. Geologists record that Ariyalur region was once submerged under the sea. The achaeon fossils and allied minerals unravel the geological reserves in this area. This area is now booming with Cement Industry and cottage units as well.

### **Thirumazhapadi**

Situated on the banks of Kollidam is Thirumazhapadi, a picturesque village. Legendary anecdotes say that Lord Nataraja promised to give another cosmic dance at Dhalavanam, the original name of this place on full moon day in the Tamil - month of Vaikasi for the benefit of the sage Markandeya who reached Chidambaram late to witness the Adi-Thandavam. Lord Nataraja, it is believed, performed the dance in the local Vaidyanathaswami Temple with a Mazhu in his hand. Hence the village derived its name Thiru - Mazhupadi. People believe that a bath in the temple tank would cure leprosy and barren women would be blessed with children.

Mythological information has it that Nandi Devar, the devotee and Lieutenant of Lord Siva, hailing from Tiruvaiyaru, just 5 kms away on the banks of the River Cauvery, married Swayambigha Devi, at the Vaidyanathasami temple in Thirumazhapadi. To commemorate this celestial wedding, the Nandikesawa wedding festival is celebrated every year in the month of Panguni. On

the Punarpoosa day Nandi Deva and Sri Panchanadeeshwar, the presiding deity of Thiruvaiyaru proceed in richly decorated palanquins, accompanied by all paraphernalia. They are received on the banks of the river near the temple in Thirumazhapadi. With mirth and gaiety the marriage is celebrated. Young men and women pray for being blessed with suitable matches. Thousands throng Thirumazhapadi on the occasion.

### **Kallankurichi Temple**

Situated just five kms on the east of Ariyalur is Kallankurichi, a small village but endowed with Kaliyuga Varadaraja Perumal temple which attracts thousands of devotees from all over the district during April-May. The deity in the sanctum sanctorum is called Lord Kaliaperumal and the Utsavamurthy is known as Varadaraja Perumal. Worship at this temple is very popular. Cattle, grains, chillies and varieties of agricultural produce are presented to the temple as offerings in fulfillment of their vows by people from all neighbouring districts. With all their beautiful sculptures, the Mandapams in the temple give a perennial feast to the visitors. Throughout the year important festivals like Chitra Pournami, Purattasi Saturdays, Vaikunda Ekadasi are celebrated. The 10-day festival of Sri Ramanavami organised with all pomp and show. Transport to Kallankurichi by frequent bus service are available. Nearest Railway Station is Ariyalur, just 7kms.

### **Melappaluvur**

On the road to Tiruchirappalli from Ariyalur is Melappaluvur which is sanctified by the hymns of Tamil Saints. Once it was the headquarters of Paluvattaiyar, the chieftain of this territory. The rock-cut temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu has an enticing appeal to the devotee and the visitor. It has been preserved as a monument by the State Archaeology Department. One can reach Melappaluvur by road from Ariyalur or Tiruchirappalli.

### **Thirumanur**

The local mythological tale tells that Lord Nataraja danced in this place with a stag in his hand.

So the place is called Thirumanur (Place of Holy Stag). It is said that Raja Raja Chola left the 20-foot high statue here on his way from Perambalur to Thanjavur.

The 20-foot tall compound wall all round the temple, the mighty seven storey Rajagopuram on the eastern entrance, the magnificent Nandhi abutting the Sthala viruksham, the two storeyed inner prakaram are all examples of high degree of mastery over architecture. It is believed to have been founded by Bhima of the epic Mahabharatha. The sun's rays fall on a few days in a year a gesture of adoration to the deity by the Sun God

### ***Sathanur Fossilised Tree***

It is a place of interest to tourists, students and researchers. Here one can see the specimens of fossilised tree. The tree measures 18 meters in length and root formation rings with trunk of the sea can be seen vividly in the rock. The entire area surrounding the fossilised tree is now a protected geological monument. Sathanur is at a distance of 25km from Ariyalur.

### ***Kamarasavall:***

Located 30 km from Ariyalur Railway Station, Kamarasaivalli has a temple built by Raja Raja Chola. A number of Chola inscriptions are found in this temple. Saint Appar is seen as drummer as he performed the Sakkai Koothu dance in this place.

### ***Karaivetti Vettaikudi Birds Sanctuary***

Karaivetti vettaikudi Birds' Sanctuary sprawls over 454 hc. of area. It is a large irrigation reservoir with water storage capacity of 228.5 mcft. The sanctuary has more than 100 species of Birds from other countries; 8 species of mammals, 18 species of reptiles and 15 varieties of fish.

It is a wonderful sight to watch a large number of birds from other parts of India and foreign lands like Siberia and Russia visiting the lake to feed, rest and breed. Notable ones are barheaded goose, Grey pelican, glossy ibis, white stork, rosy pastors,

golden orioles and 13 species of ducks and 19 species of small waders.

It is only one hour drive from Ariyalur. One can get better view in the early morning or evening. One can visit the sanctuary, between November and January by road from Thanjavur - 35 kms and Tiruchi - 65 kms.

### ***Gangaikonda Cholapuram***

Tamil Nadu constituting the south-eastern extremity of the Indian peninsula nestles along the Bay of Bengal. People of Tamil Nadu have a hoary past. Their history dates back to centuries before Christ. Their rich culture and ancient language and their maritime trade and commerce with foreign lands have been abundantly recorded by foreign travellers and chronicers like Ptolemy.

The royal dynasties-the Pandyas, the Cholas and the Cheras vied with one another not only in promoting material welfare of the people but also building centres of art and culture which illustrate the rich legacy left by them to the posterity. The imperial power of the Cholas reached its zenith during the reign of Rajendra Chola I, the son of Raja Raja Chola who built the world renowned Brahadeeswarar (Big) Temple at Thanjavur, the capital of the Chola empire.

### ***Zenith of Chola Power***

Of the three royal dynasties of ancient Tamil Nadu, the Imperial Cholas have left an indelible mark of glory of their empire spread over the South and conquered regions up to the River Ganga and Orissa. Their regal reign extended beyond the seas of Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Myanmar, the Islands of Eastern Archipelago, Lakshadweep and Java - Sumatra. Rajendra Chola-I (1012-1044) was a great builder, administrator and an indomitable warrior. He founded a new city to commemorate of his conquest of the Ganga region in the North and named it Gangaikondacholapuram

Gangaikondacholapuram and the palace have been built between 1023 and 1027AD and around

Gangaikonda cholapuram one can visit places of interest and tourist attraction and land marks of religion and new surge of creativity of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

### ***Temple of Imperial Grace***

Gangaikondacholapuram may look today of a tiny village but its glory and grandeur vividly come to the visitor's mind when he looks at the majestic temple, the frail wall, mounds of sand heaps. The city and the palace, historians say, had been built between 1023 and 1029AD. This city was carefully planned and built with high walls. The palace had many stories. A few sub-urbs came into existence during this period.

The lofty Srivimana of the temple lifts its stately head as if scanning the vast arena of the bygone empire. The temple dedicated to Lord Siva, built in brick and Brahadeeswarar Temple Thanjavur mortar is unique, resembling the Big Temple Thanjavur in certain aspects. The name of the deity in the sanctum is Pariaudayar. The lingam is 60 feet high; the stone above the base is 16 1/2 feet long and 13 1/2 feet wide. The temple campus consists of the main shrine in the middle, two subsidiary shrines to its north and south called Vada Kailasam and Then Kailasam respectively.

The main shrine consists of Garbhagraha, an Aradhana Mandapam and Mahaman- dapam. The sanctum sanctorum is always cool because moonlight stones were used in construction of this temple. Another speciality in construction is that the rays of the sun always fall in the sanctum even though the entrance is facing the east. It is a marvel of the construction. The temple tower, unlike the tower of Thanjavur Temple is gracious with all feminine elegance and charm as the tower bends a little. The unique feature of the temple is a delectable set of sculptures found on the garbhagraha walls numbering as many as fifty. They are boldly conceived and executed. The very soul of the craftsmen would have been poured out into these stone forms. It is a wonder that the bronzes of the temples survived nearly a thousand years. The metal images of Siva and Uma, forming perhaps the biggest set among such icons of surplus weir and input channels from Kollidam river and Vellar.

the Cholas are of outstanding beauty and grandeur. The Bhagesvar image near the sanctorum has an arresting image and a perfect torso.

### ***Mahamandapam***

The plinth consisting of the Upapitam and the Adhistanam, supporting the Garbha Graha, Arthamandapam and Mahamandapam also supports Manimandapam in front of the Mahamandapam. It is understood the temple complex comprised four units. There is a central passage leading from the main entrance to the Garbha graha. Small Shrines the Vada and Then Kailasam shrines were originally dedicated to Siva. Vada Kailasam has since been converted into an Amman shrine. There is a small shrine for Ganapathi to the south-west of the main shrine to the south-east to the palace remains, there is a small shrine Ayyanar and his consorts Purna and Pushkala. The Vishnu temple, about 1.5km to the west of the main Temple is associated with the lives of saint Nadhamuni and his grand son Alavandar. Some sculptures of the main temple are interesting pieces of metal. Besides these a standing Bhairavar with only the upper portion intact, and a Bhairavi is said to have been brought as trophies of the Gangetic expedition in the days of Rajendra Chola I.

### ***Maligai Medu***

Adjourning Gangaikonda cholapuram is a place called Maligai Medu. Archaeological findings reveal the glory of Rajendra Chola I. The State Archaeological Department is seized of the historical importance of the place.

### ***The Cholagangam Lake***

The lake is now called Ponneri. It was brought into being by Rajendra Chola-I as a "water pillar of victory" (Jalamayam and Jayashambham). According to Thiruvelangadu Plates it was named Cholagangam. The bund is very high and the length being more than 5 kms; at full water level, it has a water spread of nearly 130 sq.kms. It once had a

### **Conclusion**

Heritage is a continuation of human past which includes the habits, practices, culture, and character of the humanity. It is a product of thousands of years, dynasty to dynasty. It was a city under the rule of imperial Cholas. The imperial Chola capital of Thanjavur during the Cholas period. These dynasties have enriched the Socio-Cultural, monumental heritage of Ariyalur. The monumental heritage of Ariyalur highlights the special reference of Gangai konda Cholapuram. Further studies can be carried out in the all monuments of Ariyalur. The monuments of this area are protected by various efforts of Government and other organization. So it is need of the hour to create awareness among the people. As Ariyalur is an important tourist centre the tourism infrastructure should also be improved which can contribute to the overall development.

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