

# Exploring Historical Art And Temple Indication: An Inclusive Swot Of The Sayavaneswarar Temple

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## Abstract

The Sayavaneswarar Temple stands as a testament to the rich historical and artistic heritage, explored in this study. Delving into its intricate details, the research sheds light on the cultural, religious, and artistic dimensions that shaped its identity over the years. Examining the historical context surrounding its inception, the study analyzes the temple's architecture, religious significance, and artistic expressions, unraveling the symbolism in its carvings and murals. The exploration extends to the temple's role in the community's spiritual life and traces its evolution through various socio-political landscapes, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of its cultural legacy within the broader historical narrative.

Key Words: Chola, Kaveripoompattinam. Sayavaneswarar, Sayangadu,

## Introduction

The Sayavaneswarar Temple stands as a testament to the rich historical and artistic heritage embedded in its architecture and religious significance. This study endeavors to delve into the intricate details of the temple's historical

art and the evidence it presents, shedding light on the cultural, religious, and artistic dimensions that have shaped its identity over the years. To understand the significance of the Sayavaneswarar Temple, it is imperative to delve into the historical context that surrounds its inception. Examining the socio-cultural milieu during the temple's construction provides valuable insights into the motivations behind its creation and the prevailing artistic influences that left an indelible mark on its architecture.<sup>1</sup>

The temple's architecture serves as a canvas that captures the essence of a bygone era. This section will meticulously analyze the intricate details of the temple's design, exploring the use of architectural elements, sculptural adornments, and symbolic motifs that reflect the artistic prowess of the craftsmen involved in its construction. Beyond its architectural splendor, the Sayavaneswarar Temple holds profound religious importance. This segment of the study will examine the religious practices associated with the temple, tracing the evolution of rituals and ceremonies that have been integral to its identity. Additionally, an exploration of the temple's role in the local community's spiritual life will be undertaken.<sup>2</sup>

The temple's walls and sanctums are adorned with a plethora of artistic expressions, ranging from intricate carvings to vibrant murals. This section aims to unravel the symbolism embedded in these artistic manifestations, deciphering the narratives they convey and the cultural messages they impart. Over the centuries, the Sayavaneswarar Temple has undergone various transformations, influenced by changing socio-political landscapes and religious ideologies. This portion of the study will trace the temporal evolution of the temple, highlighting key periods of renovation, expansion, or modification that have contributed to its present form. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical art and temple evidence present at the Sayavaneswarar Temple. By exploring its architectural marvels, religious significance, artistic expressions, and temporal transformations, to contribute to a deeper

appreciation of the temple's cultural legacy and its role in the broader historical narrative.<sup>3</sup>

### **Architectural Marvels of the Chola Empire through the Sayavaneswarar Temple**

The Chola Empire held sway over South India from around 850 to 1250 CE, a period characterized by continual evolution and refinement in Chola art and architecture. Flourishing in a predominantly Hindu cultural milieu, the Cholas utilized the vast wealth accrued through extensive conquests to erect enduring stone temples and magnificent bronze statues. The Pallava dynasty, influenced by the Amaravati School of Architecture, served as the traditional conduit through which the Cholas constructed their temples. Drawing inspiration from contemporary architectural and aesthetic movements, Chola artists and craftspeople elevated temple architecture to unprecedented heights. One iconic testament to early Chola architecture is the Sayavaneswarar Temple, also known as Sayangadu, located in the Mayiladuthurai district of Tamil Nadu. Constructed by the Chola king Sayavaneswarar, this temple stands as a venerable symbol of Chola architectural prowess, boasting a history that spans more than 1,500 years. The Sayavaneswarar Temple serves as a pivotal artifact, offering significant evidence of the early stages of Chola's architectural ingenuity.

### **A Marvel of Spiritual Devotion and Architectural Brilliance by Kochengat Cholan**

The Maada Temple or Kovil, attributed to Ko Chengat Chozhan, stands as a testament to the intricate architectural prowess of its builder, believed to be a reincarnation of a spider in a previous life. Ko Chengat Chozhan devoted his efforts to the construction of Shiva temples, characterized by unique features such as steps designed to prevent elephants from ascending. This particular temple is distinguished as one of the six establishments deemed equivalent to Kasi. The sanctum sanctorum of the temple comprises three integral components: the sanctum itself, the antarala, and the artha mandapam. Atop this sacred

space, an octagonal Dravida vimana presides, exemplifying the distinctive architectural style of the region. The vimana serves as a symbolic and aesthetic focal point, embodying the spiritual significance of the structure. The prastaram surrounding the sanctum is adorned with intricate detailing, featuring elements such as Kapotha, Bhutavari, and Yazhivari positioned above the kabotham on the sacred Bhumidesam. These embellishments contribute to the overall grandeur of the temple, showcasing a meticulous blend of artistry and religious symbolism. The Maada Temple stands as a magnificent testament to the fusion of spiritual devotion and architectural brilliance, embodying the rich cultural and religious heritage of its time.<sup>4</sup>

### **Chronicles in Stone: The History and Inscriptions of the Sacred Temple Built by Kochengat Chola**

This temple is believed to have been constructed by Kochengat Chozha as a brick temple. Given that most Maada temples are situated along the banks of the River Kaveri and were susceptible to the threat of flooding, the structure transformed stone temples during the medieval/early Chozha period. Subsequently, it underwent further renovation and extension during the Marathas. Thirteen inscriptions have been documented from this temple, attributed to Chozha Kings such as Vikrama Chozha, Rajaraja, Kulothunga-III, and Rajendran, as well as Panya King Sundara Pandyan. According to these inscriptions, the temple's location was in Rajathiraja Valanattu Nangoor Nattu, Kaviripoompattinaththu Thiruchaikadu. Inscriptions from the period of Kulothunga Chozha-III record the endowment of Naivedyam, Milaku, the burning of perpetual lamps, and the feeding of 50 Brahmins. This endowment was supported by the income from gifted lands, which were leased for the supply of Milaku/Pepper. An order was issued to reclaim lands on which taxes had not been paid. An inscription from the Maravarman Sundara Pandyan period notes the donation of land to this temple, while a song records a gift given to Kunakaran Temple. Another inscription dated Saka 1679 (1757 CE) details the endowment of service, worship, festival celebrations, and maintenance by Rayaravutha Pindan, for which land was

donated. An inscription from the period of Rajarajan-II/III reveals that lands gifted to the temple were misused by unauthorized individuals. The land was subsequently recovered, and a Nandhavan was established in the name of Rarajaja Nandhavanam.<sup>5</sup>

The reign inscription from the 35<sup>th</sup> year of Chozha King Kulothunga Chozha-III details the endowment of naivedyam, maintenance, and the quantity of paddy to be given for each, based on the income from the temple lands. This order was issued by Pillai Ambar Udayar Kalaingarayan. The inscription attributed to Rajaraja-II (III) delineates the benefaction made by Vanavan Vizhuparayan, a denizen of Rajathiraja Valanattu Thiruvinthalur, belonging to the Marudhamangalathu malai mel marunthanavan. This munificent endowment entails the perpetual illumination of a half lamp, distinct from the previously bestowed half lamps by the same benevolent patron. Additionally, it is chronicled that the illustrious Thiruchitrabalavan, Minister to the Chola King, undertook the construction of a Mutt. Furthermore, a parcel of land was granted to facilitate the sustenance of fifty Brahmins. A separate inscription within the annals of history commemorates the pious offerings and upkeep provided to the Shiva temple at Kaveripoompattinam Pallavaneswara by Nayaravutha Mundan. This noble act of endowment was aimed at ensuring the perpetual celebration and maintenance of the sacred abode dedicated to Lord Shiva.<sup>6</sup>

### **Chola's History Sayavaneswarar Temple Through Tamil Inscriptions**

The Sayavaneswarar Temple, situated in Thiruchankaadu, stands as a testament to its rich history, primarily illuminated by the discovery of eleven Tamil inscriptions within its sacred precincts. These inscriptions, unearthed within the temple premises, serve as invaluable conduits for unraveling the historical tapestry woven around this venerable site. Delving into the inscriptions, researchers meticulously documented and governmentally registered these epigraphic gems in 1911, assigning them the serial numbers 261 to 271. A noteworthy revelation within these

inscriptions lies in their classification under different historical epochs. Among them, inscriptions from the Vikrama Chola period, the Kulothungan III period, and the Rajendran III period beckon our attention, collectively affirming the temple's antiquity and its cultural resonance spanning centuries.

The chronological positioning of these inscriptions firmly establishes the Sayavaneswarar Temple in the tapestry of the twelfth century. Beyond their temporal significance, these inscriptions function as repositories of informative content, shedding light on diverse facets of temple life and administration. They delineate directives concerning sacred rituals, emphasizing the performance of pujas within the temple precincts. Further, they prescribe measures for the illumination of the sacred space, underscoring the importance of lighting lamps to enhance the spiritual ambiance. Additionally, the inscriptions advocate for the meticulous upkeep of the temple infrastructure, elucidating procedures for repairs and maintenance. Notably, these epigraphic revelations extend beyond the spiritual realm, offering insights into the socio-economic dynamics of the era. A poignant example lies in the inscriptions' guidance on provisioning food for the labor force engaged in the temple's construction and maintenance. This nuanced glimpse into the past underscores the intricate interplay between religious practices and the sustenance of the community.<sup>7</sup>

The Sayavaneswarar Temple emerges as a custodian of history, and its Tamil inscriptions serve as indelible markers guiding us through the corridors of time. Through these epigraphic vestiges, the temple's enduring legacy becomes palpable, transcending temporal boundaries and beckoning contemporary observers to contemplate the intricate layers of its historical narrative.

Vikrama Chola (1122-1135 AD), the fourth son of Kulothungan I and Madhuranthak, daughter of Rajendra Chola II, ascended to the throne of the Chola kingdom at Cholapuram on the Ganges, surpassing his elders. His reign, marked by a lack of major conflicts, is detailed in

Ottakootha's work, "Vikramashola Ula." Faced with the weakened Chalukya kings after the death of Vikramadhitha, Vikrama Chola, determined to retain the ancestral land of Vengi, dispatched an army led by his son Abhayakulothungan. Support from Soda chieftains Konakandesvaran and Kripachima ensured the Cholas held their ground, preserving their territorial integrity. References indicate that the Kalinga War occurred both during Kulothungan's rule and Vikrama Chola's time. Vikrama Chola actively participated in wars alongside his father, as evidenced by his involvement in the Gangavadi battle.<sup>8</sup>

The Cholas, supported by Karunagara Pallava, maintained a strong presence during these conflicts. Vikrama Chola's successful campaign in Kalinga showcased the resilience of the Chola region. In the transitional period from the Chalukya to the Hoysala rule, Vikrama Chola confronted the emerging Hoysals, reclaiming the Gangavadi region. Although Vikraman, his son, engaged in fewer wars during his reign, both the Chera and Pandya nations remained loyal to the Cholas. Vikrama Chola's devotion to Shiva is evident in his contributions to the Thillainathan temple, including a golden roof and a personal palace near Chidambaram, where he spent his final years. Vikrama Chola's compassionate rule alleviated poverty, earning him the epithet of a charitable king.

The inscription on the south prakaram wall of the Thillainathan temple, dated to the third regnal year of Vikrama Chola, attests to his benevolent governance. Another inscription in the shape of a scroll, located on the southern side, references Vikrama Chola's ninth regnal year, emphasizing his commitment to supporting worship and charity. Transitioning to Kulothunga Chola III's era, historical evidence suggests a smooth succession, with Kulothunga III assuming the throne before Rajathirajan II's death. Kulothunga III faced challenges from Veera Pandyan, who, forgetting Chola's assistance, allied with Veera Kerala. The ensuing conflicts, known as the Second and Third Pandya Wars, saw Chola victories, leading to the crowning of Chola Pandyan. Inscriptions from Kulothunga III's reign, found in

the Sayavaneswarar temple, provide details of land grants and administrative orders, showcasing his focus on governance and welfare. The inscriptions also highlight the king's efforts to support the temple and its rituals, underscoring the socio-religious fabric of the Chola dynasty during this period.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Sayavaneswarar Temple stands as a remarkable embodiment of the rich historical, cultural, and religious heritage of the Chola Empire. Through a meticulous exploration of its architecture, religious practices, artistic expressions, and temporal transformations, this study unravels the multifaceted embroidery woven around this venerable site. The Chola Empire's architectural brilliance, exemplified by the Sayavaneswarar Temple, reflects a period of continual evolution and refinement in Chola art and architecture. The temple's construction by the Chola king named Sayavaneswarar over 1,500 years ago makes it a pivotal artifact, offering significant evidence of early Chola architectural ingenuity. Ko Chengat Chozhan's maada Temple further showcases the fusion of spiritual devotion and architectural brilliance, with its unique features and meticulous detailing contributing to the grandeur of the structure. The inscriptions reveal the temple's transformation from a brick temple to a stone structure, undergoing renovations and extensions over the centuries.

The Tamil inscriptions within the temple provide invaluable insights into diverse facets of temple life, administration, and the socio-economic dynamics of the era. These epigraphic revelations, spanning historical epochs such as Vikrama Chola, Kulothunga III, and Rajendran III, firmly established the Sayavaneswarar Temple in the twelfth century. The inscriptions serve as indelible markers guiding us through the corridors of time, offering a nuanced glimpse into the intricate interplay between religious practices and community sustenance. Vikrama Chola's benevolent governance and contributions to the Thillainathan temple, as evidenced by inscriptions, highlight the compassionate rule of the Chola kings. The smooth succession to Kulothunga Chola III's era further underscores

the dynasty's focus on governance and welfare, as reflected in administrative orders and support for temple rituals.<sup>10</sup>

The Sayavaneswarar Temple emerges not only as a physical structure of architectural marvel other than also as a custodian of history, encapsulating the Chola Empire's enduring legacy. Its significance extends beyond temporal boundaries, inviting contemporary observers to contemplate the intricate layers of its historical narrative and contributing to a deeper appreciation of the cultural heritage embedded in this venerable site.

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