

Celebrating the Glorious Legacy of Rajendra Chola I Aadi Thiruvathirai Festival - 23rd to 27th July, 2025

Grand Finale on 27th July to be graced by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and other Eminent Dignitaries

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The Ministry of Culture is all set to celebrate the birth anniversary of the great Chola emperor Rajendra Chola I with the Aadi Thiruvathirai Festival, to be held from 23rd to 27th July 2025 at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tamil Nadu. This special celebration also commemorates 1,000 years of Rajendra Chola's legendary maritime expedition to South East Asia and the commencement of the construction of the iconic Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple, a magnificent example of Chola architecture.

The grand finale of the festival on 27th July will be graced by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who will attend the event as Chief Guest. He will be joined by the Governor of Tamil Nadu Shri R.N. Ravi, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, and Minister of State in the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Shri Dr. L. Murugan, along with other dignitaries.

On this day, Kalakshetra Foundation will present a special Bharatanatyam group recital, followed by Devaram Thirumurai chanting by traditional Othuvars. A booklet on Devaram hymns, published by the Sahitya Akademi, will be formally released. The festival will conclude with a musical presentation by the legendary maestro Padma Vibhushan Ilaiyaraaja and his troupe, offering a fitting tribute to the spiritual and cultural brilliance of the Chola era.

The five-day festival will feature vibrant cultural performances each evening, beginning 23rd July. Visitors will witness Bharatanatyam presentations by artists from Kalakshetra Foundation, and Devaram Thirumurai chanting by students trained under the South Zone Cultural Centre, Thanjavur—both reflecting the deep spiritual and artistic traditions that flourished under the Chola reign.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will curate special exhibitions on Chola Shaivism and temple architecture, in addition to organizing heritage walks and guided tours that offer rare insights into the cultural and architectural legacy of the period.

Rajendra Chola I (1014–1044 CE) was one of the most powerful and visionary rulers in Indian history. Under his leadership, the Chola Empire expanded its influence across South and Southeast Asia. He established Gangaikonda Cholapuram as the imperial capital after his victorious campaigns, and the temple he built there served as a beacon of Shaiva devotion, monumental architecture, and administrative prowess for over 250 years. Today, the temple stands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, renowned for its intricate sculptures, Chola bronzes, and ancient inscriptions.

The Aadi Thiruvathirai festival also celebrates the rich Tamil Shaiva Bhakti tradition, fervently supported by the Cholas and immortalized by the 63 Nayanmars—the saint-poets of Tamil Shaivism. Notably, Rajendra Chola's birth star, Thiruvathirai (Ardra), begins on 23rd July, making this year's festival all the more significant.

The key aims of the festival are to highlight the profound philosophical roots of Shaiva Siddhanta and the role

of Tamil in its dissemination; to honour the contributions of the Nayanmars to the spiritual fabric of Tamil culture; and to celebrate the extraordinary legacy of Rajendra Chola I and the Chola dynasty in promoting Shaivism, temple architecture, literature, and classical arts.

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