

Netherlands returns 11th Century 'Chola Plates', PM Modi says 'joyous moment for every Indian'

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NEW DELHI: India has finally succeeded in retrieving the 'Chola Plates' considered to be among the most significant surviving records of the dynasty with Netherlands formally restituting the assets at a formal ceremony in the presence of PM Narendra Modi and PM Rob Jetten on Saturday, marking yet another success of Modi govt in recovering stolen artefacts in foreign jurisdictions. "A joyous moment for every Indian! Chola Copper Plates dating back to the 11th Century will be repatriated to India from the Netherlands. Took part in the ceremony for the same in the presence of Prime Minister Rob Jetten," PM Modi said in a post on X.

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"The Chola Copper Plates are a set of 21 large plates and 3 small plates and largely contain texts in Tamil, one of the most beautiful languages of the world. They relate to the great Rajendra Chola I formalising an oral commitment made by his father, King Rajaraja I. They also showcase the greatness of the Cholas. We in India are immensely proud of the Cholas, their culture and their maritime prowess," the PM added.

He also thanked the Government of the Netherlands and Leiden University in particular, where the Copper Plates were kept since the mid-19th century.

The restitution marks the culmination of a 14 - year long effort to get them back since 2012. Of the 668 antiquities

repatriated from various countries so far to India, 655 have returned after the Modi govt took charge in 2014.

The return of the Anaimangalam Copper Plates, known in the Netherlands as the Leiden Plates will further build on this list. The records in these plates are among the most important artefacts of Tamil heritage held anywhere outside India. The plates record important agreements about the right of a Buddhist shrine and a number of monasteries in Nagapattinam to the revenue of villages.

Dating to the reign of Emperor Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE) regarded as one of the greatest rulers in Indian history, one of objects comprises 21 copper plates, weighing approximately 30 kilograms. The plates are divided into two sections: one in Sanskrit and one in Tamil. The other object being restituted comprises three copper plates containing Tamil inscription. Both are bound together by bronze rings that bear the royal seal of the Chola dynasty.

According to sources, India's efforts to get the Chola Plates back gained decisive momentum on October 30, 2023, when the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO formally requested the inclusion of the Chola Dynasty Copper Plates in the agenda of the 24th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP).

The 24th session of the ICPRCP found that India's claim as the nation of origin was valid. As of November 2023, the UNESCO committee encouraged the Netherlands to engage in constructive bilateral dialogue with India regarding the return of the plates finally culminating in the the agreement to hand over the plates during PM Modi's visit.

The plates were brought to the Netherlands around 1712 by Florentius Camper, who was in India as part of a

Christian missionary in the period when Nagapattinam was under Dutch control. The plates were eventually donated to Leiden University in 1862 and have been housed in its Library since then.

According to officials, the precise legal and personal circumstances under which Camper obtained the plates from India are not fully documented.