

Cholas

Origin of the Cholas

- Records available after the Sangam Age show that the Cholas remained in the Kaveri region as subordinates to the Pallavas.
- The resurgence of the Cholas began with the conquest of the Kaveri delta from Muttaraiyar by Vijayalaya (850–871 CE).
- In 850, he founded the Chola kingdom and built the city of Thanjavur. As a result, historians refer to them as the **Later Cholas or Imperial Cholas**.
- The Cholas trace their ancestry to the **Karikala**, the most well-known of the Cholas of the Sangam age, according to copper plate documents of his successors.
- The progenitor of their lineage is an eponymous king named 'Chola,' according to their genealogy.
- In these copper plates, the names Killi, Kochenganan, and Karikalan are mentioned as members of the line.
- From Parantaka I (907–955) to Kulothunga III (1163–1216), Vijayalaya's illustrious successors brought the Cholas glory and fame.
- Parantaka Chola set the tone for territorial expansion and broadened the base of governance.
- rajaraja I (985–1014), the builder of the most beautiful Brihadishvara temple at Thanjavur, and his son Rajendra I (1014–1044), whose naval operation extended as far as Sri Vijaya, consolidated the advances made by their predecessors and went on to establish Chola hegemony in peninsular India.

Rulers of Cholas

Vijayalaya (850 CE)

- The Cholas' greatness was resurrected by the Vijayalaya dynasty.
- Around A.D. 850, Vijayalaya established the Imperial Chola dynasty, most likely as a vassal of the Pallava king.
- Vijayalaya occupied Tanjore and made it his capital during the conflict between the Pallavas and the Pandyas.

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- Unfortunately, the precise relationship of Vijayalaya to the earlier Cholas is unknown.
- He began his reign in the vicinity of Uraiyur, most likely as a vassal of the Pallava king.
- Vijayalaya is said to have taken Tanjavur or Tanjore from the Muttaraiyar chiefs, who supported the Pandya monarch, Varagunavarman.

Aditya I (871 - 907 CE)

- Around A.D. 875, Vijayalaya was succeeded by his capable son, Aditya I.
- Aditya I defeated Pallava king Aparajita as well as Kongu ruler Parantaka Viranarayana.
- Aditya I significantly increased the family's power and prestige by deposing Pallava Aparajitavarman and bringing Tondamandalarh under his control around 890 A.D.
- Aditya I is also credited with conquering Kongudesa and capturing Talkad in the Western Garigas.
- Aditya I was a devotee of Siva, and he erected several temples in his honour.

Parantaka I (907 - 955 CE)

- Aditya I was quickly succeeded by his son Parantaka I, who reigned from 907 to 955. During his reign, Cholas' power rose to the pinnacle.
- He annexed the territory of the Pandya King and quickly defeated the Vadumbas.
- He swept away all traces of Pallava's power, but was defeated by Rashtrakutas.
- When Parantaka I ascended the throne, the Chola realm encompassed almost the entire eastern country, from Kalahasti and Madras in the north to the Kaveri in the south, and he expanded it even further during his long reign.
- Parantaka I eventually swept away all traces of Pallava power, extending his authority all the way to Nellore in the north.

Parantaka II/ Sundara Chola (957 - 973 CE)

- Parantaka Chola II was a Chola emperor.
- He was also known as **Sundara Chola** because he was considered the pinnacle of male beauty.
- He was the son of Arinjaya Chola and Kalyani, a princess from the Vaidumba clan, an Andhra dynasty based in Kurnool and Kadapa districts.
- Parantaka II ascended the Chola throne despite the fact that his cousin Uttama Chola, the son of Gandaraditya (the elder brother of Arinjaya), was still alive and had equal, if not greater, claim to the Chola throne.
- When Parantaka II became king, the Chola kingdom had shrunk to the size of a small principality.
- The Pandyas in the south had resurrected their fortunes, defeating Chola armies and occupying their ancestral lands.

Uttama Chola (973 - 985 CE)

- Uttama Chola, born Madurantaka, ascended the Chola throne around 970 CE, succeeding Parantaka Chola II.
- Madurantaka Uttama Chola's reign is placed after Aditya II, according to Rajendra Chola's Tiruvalangadu plates.
- The latter may have been a co-regent of his father Sundara Chola and appears to have died before he could formally ascend the throne.
- Uttama was Parantaka II's cousin and the son of Sembian Mahadevi and Gandaraditya.
- He had several wives.
- Some of them are Orattanan Sorabbaiyar, Tribhuvana Mahadeviyar, Kaduvettigal Nandippottairaiyar, Siddhavadvan Suttiyar, and others.

Rajaraja I/ Arumolivarman (985 - 1014 CE)

- Rajaraja Chola I, widely regarded as the greatest king of the Chola Empire, reigned between 985 and 1014 C.E.
- By conquering the kingdoms of southern India, he laid the groundwork for the Chola kingdom's expansion into an empire.

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- He was involved in numerous battles with the Chalukyas in the north and the Pandyas in the south.
- Rajaraja established the Chalukya Chola dynasty by conquering Vengi.
- He invaded Sri Lanka and began the island's century-long Chola occupation.

Rajendra I (1014 - 1044 CE)

- Rajendra Chola I often described as Rajendra the Great, also known as Gangaikonda Chola "the bringer of the Ganges," was a Chola Emperor who reigned from 1014 to 1044 CE.
- Rajendra took over as Rajaraja I's successor in 1014 CE.
- Under Rajendra I, the vast Chola empire included most of modern-day south India, with the river Krishna as its northern limit, as well as Sri Lanka, the Laccadives, and the Maldives.
- He led a successful military expedition to the Ganges through Orissa and Bengal, bringing Ganges water to Gangaikondacholapuram, his new capital in the Kaveri Delta.
- Rajendra's audacious campaign against the Srivijaya (the southern Malay peninsula and Sumatra) is thought to have begun around 1025 CE.
- Rajendra was succeeded by Rajadhiraja I (1044 - 1052).

Rajadhiraja I (1044 - 1052 CE)

- Rajendra I's son was Rajadhiraja I (r. 1044-52). He ascended to the throne in 1044, but he had been involved with his father's administration since 1018, and he had also distinguished himself in warfare.
- Rajadhiraja I faced many difficulties upon ascending to the throne, but all opposition was quickly defeated.
- He defeated the Pandya and Kerala kings who were allied with the rulers of Lanka (Ceylon) known as Vikkamabahu, Vikkamapandu, Vira-Salamegha, and Sri-Vallabha-Madanaraja.
- He also fought against Somesvara I Ahavamalla, the Western Chalukya monarch (c. 1042-68).

- At first, fortune appears to have favoured the Chola sovereign, but he was killed in the famous battle of Koppam in May, 1052 A.D.

Rajendra II (1054 - 1063 CE)

- Rajendra Chola II reigned as the Chola emperor after his elder brother Rajadhiraja Chola I died in the 11th century.
- After his elder brother Rajadhiraja Chola's death in 1052, he is best remembered for his role in the Battle of Koppam, where he dramatically turned the tables on the Chalukyan King Someshwara I.
- During his early reign, he led an expedition to Sri Lanka, during which the Sri Lanka army was routed and their king, Vijayabahu I of Polonnaruwa, was forced to seek refuge in a mountain fortress.
- He kept the Chola Empire well-maintained, as evidenced by the distribution of his records, which show that the Chola Empire did not lose any territory during his reign by protecting it.

Virarajendra (1063 - 1067 CE)

- Rajendra II's elder brother was Vira-Rajendra. He ascended to the throne after his brother and ruled for the next seven years.
- He repelled the Chalukya King's invasion and defeated him.
- He reclaimed Vengi and thwarted the efforts of Ceylon's Vijayabahu, who was attempting to drive the Cholas out of the country.
- When Someswara II ascended to the throne of the Chalukyas, Rajendra made some incursions but later built friendly ties by giving his daughter to Vikramaditya.
- Soon after Vira Rajendra's death in 1070, a contest for the throne erupted, with Athirajendra, the heir apparent, ascending to the throne.
- Vijayabahu established Ceylon's independence after a brief but uneven reign.

Athirajendra (1067 - 1070 CE)

- Athirajendra Chola reigned as Chola king for only a few months, succeeding his father Virarajendra Chola.
- Civil unrest, possibly religious in nature, characterised his reign.

- Athirajendra Chola was the Chola Dynasty's final clan.
- He was assassinated during a religious uprising.
- After the Vengi king Rajaraja Narendra, who was closely related to the Chola clan through his mother Kundavai, a daughter of Rajaraja Chola, died in 1061 CE, Athirajindra and Virarajendra Chola intervened in Vengi succession disputes.

Kulottunga I (1070 - 1122 CE)

- Kulottunga Chola was a great Chola Empire king who reigned in the late 11th and early 12th centuries.
- He was one of the sovereigns given the title Kulottunga, which literally means "exalter of his race."
- During his early reign, he conducted a land survey and settlement to serve as the basis for taxation.
- Jayamkondar, his court poet, wrote the poem Kalingattu parani to commemorate Kulottunga Chola's military victories.
- Several land grants were given to members of the Shudra community who were generals and royal officials during his reign, indicating that he was a liberal ruler.
- He established Chola dominance over Malaysia's Sri Vijaya province Kedah.

Administration of Cholas

- Tanjore was the Chola capital.
- The Chola Empire was divided into three major administrative units: **the Central Government, the Provincial Government, and the Local Government.**
- The Uttaramerur inscriptions shed light on the Chola administration.
- The king was in charge of the administration.
- The Chola kingship was hereditary.
- According to Chola royal family tradition, the eldest son succeeded the king to the Chola throne.
- Yuvaraja was the name of the heir apparent.

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- The **tiger was the royal emblem** of Chola kings.
- A council of ministers aided the king in his work.
- Lower-level officials were referred to as Siruntaram, while higher-level officials were referred to as Peruntaram.
- The Chola government relied heavily on land revenue as its primary source of revenue.
- As a tax, one-sixth of the land's produce was collected.
- Customs and tolls were the empire's other source of revenue, in addition to land revenue.
- Furthermore, taxes on ports, forests, and mines aided the king's coffers.
- The Cholas had a strong army and navy.
- The army was made up of 70 regiments.
- The Chola kings paid a high price to import highly efficient Arabian horses.
- The Chola king served as chief justice, as major cases were tried by the king himself.
- Minor village disputes were heard by the village assembly.

Society and Economy of Cholas

- Landholding was the primary determinant of social status and hierarchy in the Chola period's predominantly agrarian society.
- The Brahmin landholders known as **brahmadeya-kilavars** were created at the top brahmadeya settlements with tax exemption, displacing (kudi neekki) the local peasants.
- Temples were given land known as **devadana**, which was tax-free, as in brahmadeyams.
- During this time, the temples became a focal point for a variety of activities.
- The landowners of the vellanvagai villages were next in the social hierarchy.
- Ulukudi (tenants) could not own land and were forced to cultivate the lands of Brahmins and vellanvagai village holders.
- While landowners kept melvaram (the majority of the harvest), the ulukudi got kizh varam (lower share).

- Slaves (adimaigal) and labourers (paniceymakkal) remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
- During the Chola period, both Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished.
- Agriculture and industry both thrived.
- The reclamation of forest lands, as well as the construction and upkeep of irrigation tanks, resulted in agricultural prosperity.
- Kanchi's weaving industry thrived, particularly silk weaving.
- The metal works evolved as a result of the high demand for images for temples and utensils.
- With trunk roads or peruvazhis and merchant guilds, commerce and trade were brisk.
- Gold, silver, and copper coins of various denominations were abundantly issued.
- The Chola Empire had extensive commercial contacts with China, Sumatra, Java, and Arabia.
- To strengthen the cavalry, Arabian horses were imported in large numbers.

Art and Architecture of Cholas

- The Cholas were the masters of the Dravidian style of art and architecture. They constructed huge temples.
- The vimana is the main attraction of the Chola temple.
- Early Chola temples can be found in the Pudukottai district at Narthamalai and Kodumbalur, and in the Tiruchirappalli district at Srinivasanallur.
- Rajaraja I built Tanjore's Big Temple, which is a work of art in South Indian art and architecture.
- The vimana, ardhmandapa, mahamandapa, and a large pavilion in the front known as the Nandimandapa make up the structure.
- The Siva temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, built by Rajendra I, is another notable contribution of the Cholas to temple architecture.
- Later Chola temples include the Airavathesvara temple in Tanjore District and the Kampaharesvara temple in Tribhuvanam.
- The Cholas also made significant contributions to sculpture.

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- Numerous large-scale icons with fine execution can be found on the walls of Chola temples such as Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram.
- Chola period bronzes are famous all over the world.
- The bronze statues of Nataraja and dancing Siva are works of art.
- The Chola paintings were discovered on the walls of the temples of Narthamalai and Tanjore.

Education and Literature of Cholas

- Education was also given priority. Aside from temples and maths as educational centres, several educational institutions flourished.
- The inscriptions at Ennayiram, Thirumukkudal, and Thirubhuvanai provide information about the colleges that existed in these locations.
- In addition to the Vedas and Epics, subjects such as mathematics and medicine were taught in these institutions. Endowment of lands was made to run these institutions.
- During the Chola period, Tamil literature reached its pinnacle.
- Thiruthakkadevar and Kundalakesi wrote Sivakasintamani in the tenth century.
- The Ramayana by Kamban and the **Periyapuram** or **Tiruttondarpuranam** by Sekkilar are the two masterworks of this era.
- **Jayankondar's Kalingattupparani** describes Kulotunga I's Kalinga war.
- **Ottakuthar's Moovarula** depicts three Chola kings' lives. Pugalendi is the author of the Nalavenba.
- The Chola period gave birth to works on Tamil grammar such as Kalladam by Kalladanar, Yapperungalam by Amirthasagarar, Jain, Nannul by Pavanandhi, and Virasoliyam by Buddhmitra.

Decline of Cholas

- From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, the Chola dynasty ruled over South India.
- Local chiefs began to gain prominence by the end of the twelfth century, weakening the centre.

- With frequent Pandya invasions, the once-mighty empire was reduced to the status of a dependent on the far stronger Hoysalas.
- Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan I, the Pandyan ruler, sacked Gangaikonda Chozhapuram, the Chola capital, in 1264.
- With Kanchipuram already lost to the Telugu Cholas, the remaining Chola territories fell into the hands of the Pandyan king.
- The Chola dynasty came to an end in 1279, when King Maravarman Kulasekara Pandyan I defeated the last Chola king, Rajendra Chola III, and established Pandya rule.

