

# Imperial Cholas

After the decline of the Sangam period, the Cholas became feudatories in Uraiyur. They became prominent in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and established an empire comprising the major portion of South India.

- Their capital was Tanjore.
- Also extended their sway in Sri Lanka and the Malay Peninsula. Therefore, they are called as the Imperial Cholas
- Founder of the Imperial Chola line was Vijayalaya.
- **Parantaka I** was a great builder of temples. He also provided the vimana of the famous Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with a golden roof. The two famous **Uttiramerur inscriptions** that give a detailed account of the village administration under the Cholas belong to his reign.

## Rajaraja I (985 – 1014 AD)

It was under Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra I that the Chola power reached its highest point of glory. His military conquests were:

1. The defeat of the Chera ruler Bhaskararavivarman in the naval battle of Kandalursalai and the destruction of the Chera navy.
2. The defeat of the Pandya ruler, Amarabhujanga and establishment of Chola authority in the Pandya country.
3. The conquest of Gangavadi, Tadigaipadi and Nolambapadi located in the Mysore region.
4. The invasion of Sri Lanka which was entrusted to his son Rajendra I. As the Sri Lankan king Mahinda V fled away from his country, the Cholas annexed the northern Sri Lanka. The capital was shifted from Anuradhapura to Polanaruva where a Shiva temple was built.
5. The Chola victory over the growing power of the Western Chalukyas of Kalyani. Satyasraya was defeated and Rajaraja I captured the Raichur Doab, Banavasi and other places. Hence the Chola power extended up to the river Tungabhadra.
6. The restoration of Vengi throne to its rulers Saktivarman and Vimaladitya by defeating the Telugu Chodas. Rajaraja gave his daughter Kundavai in marriage to Vimaladitya.
7. Rajaraja's last military achievement was a naval expedition against the Maldivian Islands which were conquered.

By these conquests, the extent of the Chola empire under Rajaraja I included the Pandya, Chera and the Tondaimandalam regions of Tamil Nadu and the Gangavadi, Nolambapadi and the Telugu Choda territories in the Deccan and the northern part of Ceylon and the Maldivian Islands beyond India. Rajaraja assumed a number of titles like Mummidi Chola, Jayankonda and Sivapadasekara. He was a devout follower of Saivism. He completed the construction of the famous Rajarajeswara temple or Brihadeswara temple at Tanjore in 1010 AD. He also helped in the construction of a Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam.

## **Rajendra I (1012-1044 AD)**

Rajendra had demonstrated his military ability by participating in his father's campaigns. He continued his father's policy of aggressive conquests and expansion. His important wars were:

1. Mahinda V, the king of Sri Lanka attempted to recover from the Cholas the northern part of Ceylon. Rajendra defeated him and seized the southern Sri Lanka. Thus the whole of Sri Lanka was made part of the Chola Empire.
2. He reasserted the Chola authority over the Chera and Pandya countries.
3. He defeated Jayasimha II, the Western Chalukya king and the river Tungabhadra was recognised as the boundary between the Cholas and Chalukyas.
4. His most famous military enterprise was his expedition to north India. The Chola army crossed the Ganges by defeating a number of rulers on its way. Rajendra defeated Mahipala I of Bengal. To commemorate this successful north-Indian campaign Rajendra founded the city of Gangaikondacholapuram and constructed the famous Rajesvaram temple in that city. He also excavated a large irrigation tank called Cholagangam on the western side of the city.
5. Another famous venture of Rajendra was his naval expedition to Kadaram or Sri Vijaya. It is difficult to pin point the real object of the expedition. Whatever its objects were, the naval expedition was a complete success. A number of places were occupied by Chola forces. But it was only temporary and no permanent annexation of these places was contemplated. He assumed the title Kadaramkondan.
6. Rajendra I had put down all rebellions and kept his empire intact.

At the death of Rajendra I the extent of the Chola Empire was at its peak. The river Tungabhadra was the northern boundary. The Pandya, Kerala and Mysore regions and also Sri Lanka formed part of the empire. He gave his daughter Ammangadevi to the Vengi Chalukya prince and further continued the matrimonial alliance initiated by his father. Rajendra I assumed a number of titles, the most famous being Mudikondan, Gangaikondan, Kadaram Kondan and Pandita Cholan. Like his father he was also a devout Saiva and built a temple for that god at the new capital Gangaikondacholapuram. He made liberal endowments to this temple and to the Lord Nataraja temple at Chidambaram. He was also tolerant towards the Vaishnava and Buddhist sects.

## **Later Rulers**

After Rajendra I, the greatness of the Chola power was preserved by rulers like Kulottunga I and Kulottunga III. Kulottunga I was the grandson of Rajendra I through his daughter Ammangadevi. He succeeded the Chola throne and thus united the Vengi kingdom with the Chola Empire. During his reign Sri Lanka became independent. Subsequently, Vengi and the Mysore region were captured by the western Chalukyas. Kulottunga I sent a large embassy of 72 merchants to China and maintained cordial relations with the kingdom of Sri Vijaya. Under Kulottunga III the central authority became weak. The rise of the feudatories like the Kadavarayas and the emergence of the Pandya power as a challenge to Chola supremacy contributed to the ultimate downfall of the Chola Empire. Rajendra III (AD 1070-1280) was the last Chola king who was defeated by Jatavarman Sundarapandya II. The Chola country was absorbed into the Pandya Empire.

# Chola Administration

## Central Government

- Excellent system of administration
- Emperor or king was at the top of the administration. The extent and resources of the Chola Empire increased the power and prestige of monarchy.
- Big capital cities like Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram, the large royal courts and extensive grants to the temples reveal the authority of the king.
- Undertook royal tours to increase the efficiency of the administration.
- Elaborate administrative machinery comprising various officials called **Perundanam** and **Sirudanam**.

## Revenue

- Land revenue department was well organized. It was called as **Puravubarithinaikkalam**.
- Residential portion of the village was called **Urnattam**.
- These and other lands such as the lands belonging to temples were exempted from tax. Besides land revenue, there were tolls and customs on goods taken from one place to another, various kinds of professional taxes, dues levied on ceremonial occasions like marriages and judicial fines.
- The hard times, there was remission of taxes and Kulottunga I became famous by abolishing tolls and earned the title – **Sungam Tavirtta Cholan**.

## Military Administration

- Royal troops were called **Kaikkolaperumpadai**.
- Within this there was a personal troop to defend the king known as **Velaikkarar**
- Attention was given to the training of the army and military cantonments called **Kadagams** existed

## Provincial Administration

- Divided into mandalams and each mandalam into valanadus and nadus.
- In each nadu there were a number of autonomous villages
- Royal princes or officers were in charge of mandalams.
- Valanadu was under periyannattar and nadu under nattar.
- Town was known as nagaram and it was under the administration of a council called nagarattar.

## **Village Assemblies**

- System of village autonomy with sabhas and their committees developed through the ages and reached its culmination during the Chola rule
- Two inscriptions belonging to the period of Parantaka I found at Uttiramerur provide details of the formation and functions of the village council
- The village was divided into thirty
- Wards and each was to nominate its members to the village council.
- From the persons duly nominated, one was to be chosen for each ward by kudavolai system for a year.
- Were divided into six variyams such as samvatsaravariyam, erivariyam, thotta variyam, pancha variyam, pon variyam and puravuvuri variyam to take up six different functions of the village administration.
- Committee members were called **Variyapperumakkal**.

## **Socio-economic Life**

- Brahmins and Kshatriyas enjoyed special privileges
- Inscriptions of the later period of the Chola rule mention about two major divisions among the castes – Valangai and Idangai castes
- Cooperation among various castes and sub-castes in social and religious life
- Position of women did not improve. The practise of ‘Sati’ was prevalent among the royal families. The devadasi system or dancing girls attached to temples emerged during this period
- Saivism and Vaishnavism continued to flourish during the Chola period.
- Temples remained centres of economic activity during this period

- Mathas had great influence during this period
- Commerce and trade were brisk with trunk roads or peruvazhis and merchant guilds
- Commercial contacts between the Chola Empire and China, Sumatra, Java and Arabia were extensively prevalent. Arabian horses were imported in large numbers to strengthen the cavalry

## **Education and Literature**

- Besides the temples and mathas as educational centres, several educational institutions also flourished.
- An inscription at Ennayiram, Thirumukkudal and Thirubhuvanai provide details of the colleges existed in these places.
- Development of Tamil literature reached its peak during the Chola period
- Sivakasintamani written by Thiruthakkadevar and Kundalakesi belonged to 10th century
- Ramayana composed by Kamban and the Periyapurana or Tiruttondarpurana by Sekkilar are the two masterpieces of this age. Jayankondar's Kalingattupparani describes the Kalinga war fought by Kulotunga I. The Moovarula written by Ottakuthar depicts the life of three Chola kings. The Nalavenba was written by Pugalendi. The works on Tamil grammar like Kalladam by Kalladanar, Yapperungalam by Amirthasagarar, a Jain, Nannul by Pavanandhi and Virasoliyam by Buddhimitra were the products of the Chola age

## **Art and Architecture**

The Dravidian style of art and architecture reached its perfection under the Cholas. They built enormous temples. The chief feature of the Chola temple is the vimana. The early Chola temples were found at Narthamalai and Kodumbalur in Pudukottai district and at Srinivasanallur in Tiruchirappalli district. The Big Temple at Tanjore built by Rajaraja I is a master-piece of South Indian art and architecture. It consists of the vimana, ardhmandapa, mahamandapa and a large pavilion in the front known as the Nandimandapa. Another notable contribution made by the Cholas to temple architecture is the Siva temple at Gangaikondacholapuram built by Rajendra I. The Airavathesvara temple at Darasuram in Tanjore District and the Kampaharesvara temple at Tribhuvanam are examples of later Chola temples. The Cholas also made rich contributions to the art of sculpture. The walls of the Chola temples such as the Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram temples contain numerous icons of large size with fine execution. The bronzes of the Chola period are world-famous. The bronze statues of Nataraja or dancing Siva are masterpieces. The Chola paintings were found on the walls of Narthamalai and Tanjore temples.