**The History of Chola Empire Indian History**

**The Cholas**

The founder of the Chola Empire was Vijayalaya, who was first feudatory of the Pallavas of Kanchi. He captured Tanjore in 850 A.D. He established a temple of goddess Nishumbhasudini (Durga) there.

Aditya I succeeded Vijayalaya. Aditya helped his overlord the Pallava king Aparajita against the Pandyas but soon defeated him and annexed the whole of the Pallava kingdom.

By the end of the ninth century, the Cholas had defeated the Pallavas completely and weakened the Pandyas capturing the Tamil country (Tondamandala) and including it under their domination He then became a sovereign ruler. The Rashtrakuta king, Krishna II gave his daughter in marriage to Aditya.

He erected many Shiva temples. He was succeeded in 907 A.D. by Parantaka I, the first important ruler of the Cholas. Parantaka I was an ambitious ruler and engaged himself in wars of conquest from the beginning of his reign. He conquered Madurai from the Pandya ruler Rajasimha II. He assumed the title of Maduraikonda (captor of Madurai).

He, however, lost to the Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna III at the battle of Tokkolam in 949 A. D. The Cholas had to cede Tondamandalam to the adversary. At that point of time the Chola kingdom almost ceased to exist. It was a serious setback to the rising Chola power. The revival of Chola power began from the accession of Parantaka II who recovered Tondamandalam to re­establish dominance of the dynasty.

The climax in Chola power was achieved under the successor of Parantaka II, Arumolivarman, who crowned himself as Rajaraja I in 985 A D the next thirty years of his rule formed the formative periodof Chola imperialism.

The Chola kingdom grew under him into an extensive and well-knit empire, efficiently organized and administered and possessing a powerful standing army and navy. Rajaraja began his conquests by attacking the confederation between the rulers of the Pandya and Kerala kingdoms and of Ceylon. Polonnaruva became the capital of Chola province in North Ceylon after the defeat of Mahinda V, the Ceylonese king.

He also annexed the Maldives. Elsewhere, several parts of modern Mysore were conquered and annexed which intensified their rivalry with the Chalukyas. Rajaraja built the magnificent Shiva temple of Brihadeshwara or Rajaraja temple at Thanjavur which was com­pleted in 1010. It is considered a remarkable piece of architecture in South Indian style.

Rajaraja I also encouraged Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman, the Sailendra ruler of Sri Vijaya to build a Buddhist Vihara at Negapatam. This vihara was called ‘Chudamani Vihara’ after the father of Sri Mara. Rajaraja was succeeded by his son Rajendra I in 1014 A.D. He ruled jointly with his father for a few years. He also followed a policy of conquest and annexation adopted by his father and further raised the power and prestige of the Cholas. He followed the expansionist policy and made extensive con­quests in Ceylon.

The Pandya and Kerala country after being conquered was constituted as a viceroyalty under the Chola king with the title of Chola-Pandya. Madurai was its headquarters. Pro­ceeding through Kalinga, Rajendra I attacked Bengal and defeated the Pala ruler Mahipala in 1022 A.D. But he annexed no territory in north India

To commemorate the occasion, Rajendra I assumed the title of Gangaikondachola (the Chola conqueror of Ganga). He built the new capital near the mouth of the Kaveri and called it Gangaikondacholapuram (the city of the Chola conqueror of the Ganga).

With his naval forces, he invaded Malaya Peninsula and Srivijaya Empire that extended over Sumatra, Java and the neighbouring islands and controlled the overseas trade route to China. He sent two diplomatic missions to China for political as well as commercial purposes.

Rajendra was succeeded by his son Rajadhiraja I in 1044 A.D. He was also an able ruler. He put down the hostile forces in Ceylon and suppressed the rebellious Pandyas and subjugated their terri­tory. He celebrated his victory by performing Virabhisheka (coronation of the victor) at Kalyani after sacking Kalyani and assumed the title of Vijayarajendra. He lost his life in the battle with the Chalukyan king Someswara I at Koppam. His brother Rajendra II succeeded him. He continued his struggle against Someswara.

He defeated Someswara in the battle of Kudal Sangamam. Next came Virarajendra I, he too defeated the Chalukyas and erected a pillar of victory on the banks of Tungabhadra. Virarajendra died in 1070 A.D. He was succeeded by Kulottunga I (1070-1122 A.D.) the great-grandson of Rajaraja I. He was the son of Rajendra Narendra of Vengi and Chola princess Ammangadevi (daughter of Rajendra Chola I). Thus Kulottunga I united the two kingdoms of the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi and the Cholas of Thanjavur.

The most important reforms carried out by him in the internal administration was the re- surveyal of land for taxation and revenue purposes. He was also titled Sungam tavirtta (he who abol­ished tolls). The Chola authority in Ceylon was overthrown by Vijayababu, the monarch of Ceylon during Kulottunga’s reign. He sent a large embassy of 72 merchants to China and also maintained cordial relations with Sri Vijaya.

He defeated the rulers of the Pandya kingdom and that of Kerala. Thfe Chola Empire continued for more than a century after him. Weak rulers succeeded him. The Cholas and the later Chalukyas clashed for the overlordship of Vengi, the Tungabhadra doab and the Ganga country.

The Chola Empire continued in a flourishing condition during the twelfth century but declined by the end of the thirteenth century. The Pandyan king Sundara rendered the final blow by seizing Kanchi in 1297 A.D. The place of the Cholas was taken over by the Pandyas and the Hoysalas. This marked the end of the Chola power.

**Administration:**

The king was the head of the administration of the Cholas and all powers were concentrated in his hands. The form of the Chola government was hereditary monarchy. The rule of primogeniture generally prevailed. The king generally appointed his Yuvaraja (heir) during his reign.

The Chola rulers took high- sounding titles as Gangaikondacholapuram. The royal household also runs on an elaborate scale. The royal priest Rajguru became the close confidant of the royal family. The king had council of ministers to aid and assists him.

The king gave verbal orders (tiruvakya-kelvi) which were drafted by the private secretary and confirmed by the Olainayamak (Chief Secretary) and a Perundaram before its despatch by the Vidaiyadhikari (despatch clerk). They often advised him on important matters. An elaborate and complicated bureaucracy ran the government.

The officials tended to form a separate class in society. Perundaram were higher officials while sirutaram were lower officials. Peruvalis (trunk roads) helped in royal tours. The general tendency was to make the officers hereditary. The officials were paid by assignments of land called jivitas according to their status.

**Revenue Administration:**

A well-organised department of land revenue, known as the puravu-varitinaik – katam was in existence. Land revenue was collected in cash or kind. Land was possessed by individuals and communities. The state under Rajaraja demanded 1/3rd of the gross produce. Kadamai or Kudimai, according to N.K. Sastri was the land revenue. There were taxes on profession, mines, forests, salt­pans, etc. Kulottung I abolished tolls. Unpaid labour was frequently employed.

**Military Administration:**

The army consisted of infantry, cavalry and elephants which formed the three limbs of the great army – Mun-rukai-Mahasenai. The Kaikkolas were soldiers armed with strong arms and the Sengundar were armed with spears.

The Velaikkarars were the most dependable troops in the royal service and were the bodyguards of the monarch, who defended him with their lives and were ready to immolate themselves on the king’s funeral. Attention was given to the training of the army and cantonments, called Kadagams or padaividu, existed. The Cholas paid special attention to their navy.

The whole empire was divided into mandalams or provinces. Sometimes princes of the royal family were appointed governors of the provinces. Further they were divided into valanadus (divisions), nadus (districts) and kurrams (villages). Village was the basic unit of administration.

The villages were mainly of three types. The first type constituted of an intercaste population where the land was held by all classes of people and paid taxes to the king in the form of land revenue. It was the most frequent type. The second was the Brahmadeya or agrahara villages which was granted to the Brahmins and was entirely inhabited by them.

They were exempted from tax and were prosperous. The third type of village was the Devadana, which were villages granted to god. The revenues from these villages were donated to a temple. During Cholas the Devadana type of villages gained more popularity as the temples became the centres of life.

There was remarkable autonomy at the village level. Chola officials partici­pated in village administration more as observers than as administrators. The Cholas are best known for their local self-government at the village level.

We hear of three assemblies called the ur, sabha or mahasabha and nagaram. The ur was a general assembly of the village. The ur consisted of all the tax-paying residents of an ordinary village. The Alunganattar was the executive committee and the ruling group of the ur.

The ur open to all male adults but was dominated by the older members. The sabha was apparently an exclusively Brahmin assembly of the brahmadeya villages. The sabha had more complex machinery, which functioned largely through its committees called the variyams.

Elec­tion to the executive body and other committees of the ur and sabha appears to have been conducted by draw of lots from among those who were eligible. The nagaram was an assembly of merchants and were found more commonly in the trading centers.

The Uttaramerur inscriptions of the Chola monarch Parantaka I of 919 A.D. and 921 A.D may be said to constitute a great landmark in the history of the Chola village assemblies. It gives details about the functioning and constitution of the local sabha.

The 919 A.D. inscriptions framed the rules for election and 921 A.D. incriptions amended them.

There were 30 wards (kudumbus) each nominatin members for selections of people with the prescribed qualifications. Elections from each ward was by lot (kudavolai, literally means pot-ticket) for a period of one year.

Of the thirty so selected, twelve members who had earlier served in the garden and tank committee and were advanced in age, were assigned to the samvatsarvariyam or annual committee, twelve to the Tottavariyam or the garden committee and 6 members to the Eri-variyam or tank committee Pancha-variyam (a standing committee) and Pon-variyam (gold committee) were the other two committees.

Variyapparumakal were the members of the committee, Perunguri were the members of the Mahasabha; Nyayaffarwas the Judicial committee and Madhyasthas, a small staff of paid servants in the village assisted the committees and maintained village records. The Assembly generally met in the temple, or under a tree or near a tank

The sabha possessed proprietary rights over communal lands. It also controlled private lands of the villages. It reclaimed forest and waste land. It aided in the assessment of the produce and land revenue. It collected land revenue and had the power to sell the land in question, in cases of default. I also had the powers of taxation for purposes connected with the village and of remission of taxation for specific reasons.

**Economic Life:**

Land tax constituted the single largest source of income of the Chola state. It was generally assessed at one-third of the produce. The village assembly took land tax and local levies. Cattle rearing were a subsidiary occupation.

Trade with foreign countries was an important feature of the Cholas mercantile activities. The rulers built a network of royal roads that were useful for trade as well as for the movement of the army. There were gigantic trade guilds that traded with Java and Sumatra.

South India exported textiles, spices, drugs, jewels, ivory, horn, ebony and camphor to China. Trade brought considerable prestige and affluence to the Cholas. Kalanju was the currency prevalent in the Chola kingdom.

**Social Life:**

The caste system was the basis of the social organization under the Cholas. Society was divided into a number of social groups or castes. Each caste was hereditary and constituted an occupational group. Bramhanas occupied a privilege position in the society. They combined both religious authority and economic power. They were exempted from taxes, owned and enjoyed land with full royal support.

Their main duties included learning and teaching of the Vedas and performing rituals and ceremonies. Some of them served as chief priests of the temple. Some of them were more adventurous and engaged themselves in trade.

They were given lighter punishments in case of offences committed. The almost total absence of Kshatriya institutions necessitated an alliance between sections of brahmanas and the dominant peasantry. The Nattar was the dominant peasant community, and the cultivators were the subordinate client group of the nattars. The newly assimilated castes from marginal tracts were often combined in mass groupings of Idangai (left handed castes) and Valangai (right handed castes.

Rudimentary hierarchy of social groups from classical times according to the Silapadikaram were vellalar-cultivator, kovalar-cowherds and shepherds, vedar-hunters, Padaiyacciar- artisan groups and armed men and valaiyar-fishermen. Worship of deceased rulers and construction of temples as tributes to dead kings was a special feature of the Chola period.

# Chola dynasty 300s BCE–1279 CE

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| --- | --- |
| **Capital** | * [Early Cholas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Cholas): [Poompuhar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poompuhar), [Urayur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urayur), [Tiruvarur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruvarur) * Medieval Cholas: [Pazhaiyaarai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazhaiyaarai), [Thanjavur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur) * [Gangaikonda Cholapuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangaikonda_Cholapuram) |
| **Government** | Monarchy |
| [**King**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King)**and**[**Emperor**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor) |  |
|  | |
| • 848–871 | [Vijayalaya Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayalaya_Chola) (first) |
| • 1246–1279 | [Rajendra Chola III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_III) (last) |
| **Historical era** | [Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages) |
|  | |
| • Established | 300s BCE |
| • Rise of the medieval Cholas | 848 CE |
| • Empire at its greatest extent | 1030 CE |
| • Disestablished | 1279 CE |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Succeeded by** | |  | |  |  | | --- | --- | | [Pandyan dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandyan_dynasty) | /var/folders/1n/dd_x0znj42jd43926cdc29g00000gn/T/com.microsoft.Word/WebArchiveCopyPasteTempFiles/Blank.png | | | |

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| **List of Chola kings and emperors** |
| [**Early Cholas**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Cholas) |
| * [Ellalan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellalan) * [Kulakkottan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulakkottan) * [Ilamchetchenni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilamchetchenni) * [Karikala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karikala) * [Nedunkilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nedunkilli) * [Nalankilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nalankilli) * [Killivalavan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killivalavan) * [Kopperuncholan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kopperuncholan) * [Kochchenganan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kochchenganan) * [Perunarkilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perunarkilli) |
| **Interregnum (c. 200 – c. 848)** |
| [**Medieval Cholas**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_Cholas) |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | [Vijayalaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayalaya_Chola) | 848–891(?) | | [Aditya I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aditya_I) | 891–907 | | [Parantaka I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parantaka_I) | 907–950 | | [Gandaraditya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandaraditya) | 950–957 | | [Arinjaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arinjaya) | 956–957 | | [Sundara (Parantaka II)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parantaka_Chola_II) | 957–970 | | [Aditya II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aditya_Karikalan) | (co-regent) | | [Uttama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttama_Chola) | 970–985 | | [Rajaraja I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_I) | 985–1014 | | [Rajendra I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_I) | 1012–1044 | | [Rajadhiraja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajadhiraja_Chola) | 1044–1054 | | [Rajendra II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_II) | 1054–1063 | | [Virarajendra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virarajendra_Chola) | 1063–1070 | | [Athirajendra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athirajendra_Chola) | 1070–1070 | |
| [**Later Cholas**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Later_Cholas) |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | [Kulothunga I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_I) | 1070–1120 | | [Vikrama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikrama_Chola) | 1118–1135 | | [Kulothunga II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_II) | 1133–1150 | | [Rajaraja II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_II) | 1146–1173 | | [Rajadhiraja II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajadhiraja_Chola_II) | 1166–1178 | | [Kulothunga III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_III) | 1178–1218 | | [Rajaraja III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_III) | 1216–1256 | | [Rajendra III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_III) | 1246–1279 | |

The **Chola dynasty** was a [Tamil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people) dynasty of southern India, one of the longest-ruling dynasties in the world's history. The earliest datable references to the Cholaare in inscriptions from the 3rd century BCE left by [Ashoka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoka), of the [Maurya Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurya_Empire) ([Ashoka Major Rock Edict No.13](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoka_Major_Rock_Edict_No.13)). As one of the [Three Crowned Kings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Crowned_Kings) of [Tamilakam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamilakam), along with the [Chera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chera_dynasty) and [Pandya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandya_dynasty), the dynasty continued to govern over varying territory until the 13th century CE. Despite these ancient origins, the period when it is appropriate to speak of a "Chola Empire" only begins with the [medieval Cholas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_Cholas) in the mid-9th century CE.

The heartland of the Cholas was the fertile valley of the [Kaveri River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaveri_River), but they ruled a significantly larger area at the height of their power from the later half of the 9th century till the beginning of the 13th century. The whole country south of the [Tungabhadra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tungabhadra) was united and held as one state for a period of three centuries and more between 907 and 1215 AD. Under [Rajaraja Chola I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_Chola_I) and his successors [Rajendra Chola I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_I), [Rajadhiraja Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajadhiraja_Chola), [Virarajendra Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virarajendra_Chola), and [Kulothunga Chola I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_I), the dynasty became a military, economic and cultural power in [South Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asia) and [South-East Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-East_Asia).  The power of the new empire was proclaimed to the eastern world by the expedition to the [Ganges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganges) which [Rajendra Chola I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_I) undertook and by [naval raids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_invasion_of_Srivijaya) on cities of the city-state of [Srivijaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srivijaya), as well as by the repeated embassies to China. The Chola fleet represented the zenith of [ancient Indian sea power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_maritime_history).

During the period 1010–1153, the Chola territories stretched from the islands of the [Maldives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maldives) in the south to as far north as the banks of the [Godavari River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godavari_River) in [Andhra Pradesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andhra_Pradesh). Rajaraja Chola conquered peninsular [South India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_India), annexed parts of which is now [Sri Lanka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) and occupied the islands of the Maldives. Rajendra Chola sent a victorious expedition to North India that touched the river [Ganges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganges) and defeated the [Pala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pala_Empire) ruler of [Pataliputra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pataliputra), [Mahipala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahipala). He also successfully invaded cities of [Srivijaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srivijaya) of [Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia) and [Indonesia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia). The Chola dynasty went into decline at the beginning of the 13th century with the rise of the [Pandyan dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandyan_dynasty), which ultimately caused their downfall.

The Cholas left a lasting legacy. Their patronage of [Tamil literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_literature) and their zeal in the building of temples has resulted in some great works of Tamil literature and architecture. The Chola kings were avid builders and envisioned the temples in their kingdoms not only as places of worship but also as centres of economic activity. They pioneered a centralised form of [government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_Government) and established a disciplined bureaucracy. The Chola school of art spread to [Southeast Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) and influenced the architecture and art of Southeast Asia.

## **Origins**

The Cholas are also known as the Choda. The antiquity of the name is evident from the mentions in [ancient Tamil literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangam_literature) and in inscriptions. During the past 150 years, historians have gleaned significant knowledge on the subject from a variety of sources such as ancient Tamil Sangam literature, oral traditions, religious texts, temple and [copperplate inscriptions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper-plate_grant). The main source for the available information of the early Cholas is the early Tamil literature of the Sangam Period.[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-17) Mentions in the early [Sangam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangam_period) literature (c. 150 CE)[[b]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-18) indicate that the earliest kings of the dynasty antedated 100 CE. There are also brief notices on the Chola country and its towns, ports and commerce furnished by the [Periplus of the Erythraean Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periplus_of_the_Erythraean_Sea) (Periplus Maris Erythraei), and in the slightly later work of the geographer [Ptolemy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy). [Mahavamsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahavamsa), a [Buddhist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist) text written down during the 5th century CE, recounts a number of conflicts between the inhabitants of [Ceylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceylon)and Cholas in the 1st century BCE. Cholas are mentioned in the [Pillars of Ashoka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pillars_of_Ashoka) (inscribed 273 BCE–232 BCE) inscriptions, where they are mentioned among the kingdoms which, though not subject to Ashoka, were on friendly terms with him.

A commonly held view is that Chola is, like [Chera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chera_dynasty) and [Pandya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandyan_dynasty), the name of the ruling family or clan of immemorial antiquity. The annotator [Parimelazhagar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parimelazhagar) said: "The charity of people with ancient lineage (such as the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras) are forever generous in spite of their reduced means". Other names in common use for the Cholas are Killi , Valavan , Sembiyan and Cenni. Killi perhaps comes from the Tamil kil meaning dig or cleave and conveys the idea of a digger or a worker of the land. This word often forms an integral part of early Chola names like [Nedunkilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nedunkilli), [Nalankilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nalankilli) and so on, but almost drops out of use in later times. Valavan is most probably connected with "valam” fertility and means owner or ruler of a fertile country. Sembiyan is generally taken to mean a descendant of [Shibi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shibi_(king)) – a legendary hero whose self-sacrifice in saving a dove from the pursuit of a falcon figures among the early Chola legends and forms the subject matter of the [Sibi Jataka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibi_Jataka) among the [Jataka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jataka) stories of [Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism). In Tamil lexicon Chola means Soazhi or Saei denoting a newly formed kingdom, in the lines of Pandya or the old country. Cenni in Tamil means Head.

Historical records in the form of epigraphs and copper-plate grants exist from the time of the [Medieval Cholas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_Cholas) who claimed a long and ancient lineage in these records. The Anbil plates of [Sundara Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sundara_Chola) traces the king's lineage from [Vishnu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu) through [Marichi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marichi), [Kasyapa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kasyapa) and Sibi among others. The Tiruvalangadu plates of [Rajendra Chola I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_I) and the [Kanyakumari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanyakumari) inscription of [Virarajendra Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virarajendra_Chola) trace the origin of the Cholas to the [Solar dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_dynasty) of [Ikshvaku](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikshvaku) who was the son of [Satyavrata (Sraddhadeva Manu)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shraddhadeva_Manu), the king of [Dravida kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dravida_kingdom). The Tiruvalangadu plates, in addition to tracing the lineage to the solar dynasty mention Sibi, the son of Usinara as an ancestor. However, according to Puranas, emperor [Sibi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shibi_(king)) belonged to the [Lunar race](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunar_dynasty). Historians have dismissed these divine ancestries as nothing but fanciful inventions as it was the norm at that time for Indian kingdoms, particularly south Indian dynasties to connect their lineages to the Solar and Lunar races of north India because in order to gain legitimacy the king had to be a [Kshatriya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kshatriya).

## **History**

The history of the Cholas falls into four periods: the [Early Cholas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Cholas) of the Sangam literature, the interregnum between the fall of the Sangam Cholas and the rise of the Imperial medieval Cholas under [Vijayalaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayalaya_Chola) (c. 848), the dynasty of Vijayalaya, and finally the [Later Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Later_Chola) dynasty of Kulothunga Chola I from the third quarter of the 11th century.

### Early Cholas

The earliest Chola kings for whom there is tangible evidence are mentioned in the Sangam literature. Scholars generally agree that this literature belongs to the second or first few centuries of the [common era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_era). The internal chronology of this literature is still far from settled, and at present a connected account of the history of the period cannot be derived. It records the names of the kings and the princes, and of the poets who extolled them.

The Sangam literature also records legends about mythical Chola kings. These myths speak of the Chola king Kantaman, a supposed contemporary of the sage [Agastya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agastya), whose devotion brought the river Kaveri into existence. Two names are prominent among those Chola kings known to have existed who feature in Sangam literature: [Karikala Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karikala_Chola) and [Kocengannan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kocengannan). There are no sure means of settling the order of succession, of fixing their relations with one another and with many other princelings of around the same period. [Urayur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urayur) (now a part of [Thiruchirapalli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiruchirapalli)) was their oldest capital.  [Kaveripattinam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaveripattinam) also served as an early Chola capital. The [Mahavamsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahavamsa) mentions that an ethnic Tamil adventurer, a Chola prince known as [Ellalan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellalan), invaded the island Sri Lanka and conquered it around 235 BCE with the help of a [Mysore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore) army.

### Interregnum

There is not much information about the transition period of around three centuries from the end of the Sangam age (c. 300) to that in which the Pandyas and [Pallavas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pallava_dynasty) dominated the Tamil country. An obscure dynasty, the [Kalabhras](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalabhras) invaded Tamil country, displaced the existing kingdoms and ruled during that time. They were displaced by the Pallava dynasty and the Pandyan dynasty in the 6th century. Little is known of the fate of the Cholas during the succeeding three centuries until the accession of Vijayalaya in the second quarter of the 9th century. As per inscriptions found in and around Thanjavur, the kingdom was ruled by [Mutharaiyars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutharaiyar_dynasty) / [Muthurajas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muthuraja) for three centuries. Their reign was ended by Vijayalaya chola who captured Thanjavur from [Ilango Mutharaiyar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilango_Mutharaiyar) between 848-851 CE.

[Epigraphy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epigraphy) and literature provide few glimpses of the transformations that came over this line of kings during this long interval. It is certain that when the power of the Cholas fell to its lowest ebb and that of the Pandyas and Pallavas rose to the north and south of them, this dynasty was compelled to seek refuge and patronage under their more successful rivals. The Cholas continued to rule over a diminished territory in the neighbourhood of Uraiyur, but only in a minor capacity. In spite of their reduced powers, the Pandayas and Pallavas accepted Chola princesses in marriage, possibly out of regard for their reputation. Numerous Pallava inscriptions of this period mention their having fought rulers of the Chola country Despite this loss in influence and power, it is unlikely that the Cholas lost total grip of the territory around Uraiyur, their old capital, as Vijayalaya, when he rose to prominence hailed from that area.

Around the 7th century, a Chola kingdom flourished in present-day Andhra Pradesh. These [Telugu Cholas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telugu_Cholas) traced their descent to the early Sangam Cholas. However, it is not known if they had any relation to the early Cholas. It is possible that a branch of the Tamil Cholas migrated north during the time of the Pallavas to establish a kingdom of their own, away from the dominating influences of the Pandyas and Pallavas. The [Chinese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) pilgrim [Xuanzang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xuanzang), who spent several months in [Kanchipuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanchipuram) during 639–640 writes about the "kingdom of Culi-ya", in an apparent reference to these Telugu Cholas.

### Imperial Cholas

Vijayalaya was the founder of the Imperial Chola dynasty which was the beginning of one of the most splendid empires in Indian history. [Vijayalaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayalaya), possibly a feudatory of the Pallava dynasty, took an opportunity arising out of a conflict between the Pandya dynasty and Pallava dynasty in c. 850, captured [Thanjavur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur) from [Muttarayar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muthuraja), and established the imperial line of the medieval Chola Dynasty. Thanjavur became the capital of the Imperial Chola Dynasty.

The Chola dynasty was at the peak of its influence and power during the medieval period. Through their leadership and vision, Chola kings expanded their territory and influence. The second Chola King, [Aditya I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aditya_I), caused the demise of the Pallava dynasty and defeated the Pandyan dynasty of [Madurai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madurai) in 885, occupied large parts of the Kannada country, and had marital ties with the Western Ganga dynasty. In 925, his son [Parantaka I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parantaka_I) conquered Sri Lanka (known as Ilangai). Parantaka I also defeated the [Rashtrakuta dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashtrakuta_dynasty) under Krishna II in the battle of Vallala.

Rajaraja Chola I and Rajendra Chola I were the greatest rulers of the Chola dynasty, extending it beyond the traditional limits of a Tamil kingdom. At its peak, the Chola Empire stretched from the island of Sri Lanka in the south to the Godavari-[Krishna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna)river basin in the north, up to the Konkan coast in Bhatkal, the entire Malabar Coast in addition to [Lakshadweep](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshadweep), Maldives, and vast areas of Chera country. Rajaraja Chola I was a ruler with inexhaustible energy, and he applied himself to the task of governance with the same zeal that he had shown in waging wars. He integrated his empire into a tight administrative grid under royal control, and at the same time strengthened local self-government. Therefore, he conducted a land survey in 1000 CE to effectively marshall the resources of his empire. He also built the [Brihadeeswarar Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadeeswarar_Temple) in 1010 CE.

Rajendra Chola I conquered [Odisha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odisha) and his armies continued to march further north and defeated the forces of the [Pala Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pala_Dynasty) of [Bengal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengal) and reached the Ganges river in north India. Rajendra Chola I built a new capital called [Gangaikonda Cholapuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangaikonda_Cholapuram) to celebrate his victories in northern India. Rajendra Chola I successfully invaded the [Srivijaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srivijaya) kingdom in Southeast Asia which led to the decline of the empire there. This expedition had such a great impression to the [Malay people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_people) of the medieval period that his name was mentioned in the corrupted form as Raja Chulan in the medieval Malay chronicle Sejarah Melayu. He also completed the conquest of the island of Sri Lanka and took the Sinhala king Mahinda V as a prisoner, in addition to his conquests of Rattapadi (territories of the Rashtrakutas, Chalukya country, [Talakkad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talakkad), and [Kolar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolar), where the Kolaramma temple still has his portrait statue) in Kannada country. Rajendra's territories included the area falling on the Ganges-Hooghly-Damodar basin, as well as Sri Lanka and Maldives. The kingdoms along the east coast of India up to the river Ganges acknowledged Chola suzerainty. Three diplomatic missions were sent to China in 1016, 1033, and 1077.

The [Western Chalukya Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Chalukya_Empire) under [Satyashraya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyashraya) and [Someshvara I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Someshvara_I) tried to wriggle out of Chola domination from time to time, primarily due to the Chola influence in the [Vengi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vengi) kingdom. The Western Chalukyas mounted several unsuccessful attempts to engage the Chola emperors in war, and except for a brief occupation of Vengi territories between 1118–1126, all their other attempts ended in failure with successive Chola emperors routing the armies of the Chalukyas at various places in many wars. Virarajendra Chola defeated Someshvara II of the Western Chalukya Empire and made an alliance with Prince [Vikramaditya VI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikramaditya_VI). Cholas always successfully controlled the Chalukyas in the western [Deccan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deccan_Plateau) by defeating them in war and levying tribute on them. Even under the emperors of the Cholas like Kulothunga I and Vikrama Chola, the wars against the Chalukyas were mainly fought in Chalukya territories in Karnataka or in the Telugu country like Vengi, Kakinada, Anantapur, or Gutti. Then the former feudatories like the Hoysalas, Yadvas, and Kakatiyas steadily increased their power and finally replaced the Chalukyas. With the occupation of Dharwar in North Central Karnataka by the [Hoysalas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoysalas) under [Vishnuvardhana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnuvardhana), where he based himself with his son Narasimha I in-charge at the Hoysala capital Dwarasamudra around 1149, and with the [Kalachuris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalachuris_of_Kalyani) occupying the Chalukyan capital for over 35 years from around 1150–1151, the Chalukya kingdom was already starting to dissolve.

The Cholas under [Kulothunga Chola III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_III) collaborated to the herald the dissolution of the Chalukyas by aiding Hoysalas under [Veera Ballala II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veera_Ballala_II), the son-in-law of the Chola monarch, and defeated the Western Chalukyas in a series of wars with [Someshvara IV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Someshvara_IV) between 1185–1190. The last Chalukya king's territories did not even include the erstwhile Chalukyan capitals Badami, Manyakheta or Kalyani. That was the final dissolution of Chalukyan power though the Chalukyas existed only in name since 1135–1140. But the Cholas remained stable until 1215, were absorbed by the Pandyan empire and ceased to exist by 1279.

On the other hand, throughout the period from 1150–1280, the staunchest opponents of the Cholas were Pandya princes who tried to win independence for their traditional territories. This period saw constant warfare between the Cholas and the Pandyas. The Cholas also fought regular wars with the Eastern [Gangas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangas) of [Kalinga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalinganagar), protected Vengi though it remained largely independent under Chola control, and had domination of the entire eastern coast with their feudatories the Telugu Cholas, Velananti Cholas, Renandu Cholas etc. who also always aided the Cholas in their successful campaigns against the Chalukyas and levying tribute on the Kannada kingdoms and fought constantly with the [Sinhalas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhalese_people), who attempted to overthrow the Chola occupation of [Lanka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanka), but until the time of the Later Chola king Kulottunga I the Cholas had firm control over Lanka. A Later Chola king, [Rajadhiraja Chola II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajadhiraja_Chola_II), was strong enough to prevail over a confederation of five Pandya princes who were aided by their traditional friend, the king of Lanka, this once again gave control of Lanka to the Cholas despite the fact that they were not strong under the resolute Rajadhiraja Chola II. However, his successor, the last great Chola monarch [Kulottunga Chola III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulottunga_Chola_III)reinforced the hold of the Cholas by quelling rebellion and disturbances in Lanka and Madurai, defeated Hoysala generals under Veera Ballala II in Karuvur, in addition to holding on to his traditional territories in Tamil country, Eastern Gangavadi, Draksharama, Vengi and Kalinga. After this, he entered into a marital alliance with Veera Ballala II (with Ballala's marriage to a Chola princess) and his relationship with Hoysalas seems to have become friendlier.

### Overseas conquests

During the reign of Rajaraja Chola I and his successors Rajendra Chola I, Virarajendra Chola and Kulothunga Chola I the Chola armies invaded Sri Lanka, the Maldives and parts of Southeast Asia like Malaysia, Indonesia and Southern Thailandof the Srivijaya Empire in the 11th century. Rajaraja Chola I launched several naval campaigns that resulted in the capture of Sri Lanka, Maldives and the Malabar Coast. In 1025, Rajendra Chola launched naval raids on ports of Srivijaya and against the Burmese kingdom of Pegu. A Chola inscription states that he captured or plundered 14 places, which have been identified with Palembang, [Tambralinga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tambralinga) and Kedah among others. A second invasion was led by Virarajendra Chola, who conquered [Kedah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kedah) in Malaysia of Srivijaya in the late 11th century. Chola invasion ultimately failed to install direct administration over Srivijaya, since the invasion was short and only meant to plunder the wealth of Srivijaya. However, this invasion gravely weakened the Srivijayan hegemony and enabled the formation of regional kingdoms. Although the invasion was not followed by direct Cholan occupation and the region was unchanged geographically, there were huge consequences in trade. Tamil traders encroached on the Srivijayan realm traditionally controlled by Malay traders and the Tamil guilds' influence increased on the Malay Peninsula and north coast of Sumatra.

### Later Cholas (1070–1279)

Marital and political alliances between the [Eastern Chalukyas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Chalukyas) began during the reign of Rajaraja following his invasion of Vengi. Rajaraja Chola's daughter married Chalukya prince Vimaladityaand Rajendra Chola's daughter Ammanga Devi was married to the Eastern Chalukya prince [Rajaraja Narendra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_Narendra). Virarajendra Chola's son, [Athirajendra Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athirajendra_Chola), was assassinated in a civil disturbance in 1070, and Kulothunga Chola I, the son of Ammanga Devi and Rajaraja Narendra, ascended the Chola throne. Thus began the Later Chola dynasty.

The Later Chola dynasty was led by capable rulers such as Kulothunga Chola I, his son [Vikrama Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikrama_Chola), other successors like Rajaraja Chola II, Rajadhiraja Chola II, and Kulothunga Chola III, who conquered Kalinga, [Ilam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eelam), and [Kataha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kataha). However, the rule of the later Cholas between 1218, starting with [Rajaraja Chola II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_Chola_II), to the last emperor [Rajendra Chola III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajendra_Chola_III) was not as strong as those of the emperors between 850–1215. Around 1118, they lost control of Vengi to the Western Chalukya and Gangavadi (southern [Mysore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore) districts) to the [Hoysala Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoysala_Empire). However, these were only temporary setbacks, because immediately following the accession of king Vikrama Chola, the son and successor of Kulothunga Chola I, the Cholas lost no time in recovering the province of Vengi by defeating Chalukya Someshvara III and also recovering Gangavadi from the Hoysalas. The Chola Empire, though not as strong as between 850–1150, was still largely territorially intact under Rajaraja Chola II (1146–1175) a fact attested by the construction and completion of the third grand Chola architectural marvel, the chariot-shaped [Airavatesvara Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airavatesvara_Temple) at Dharasuram on the outskirts of modern Kumbakonam. Chola administration and territorial integrity until the rule of Kulothunga Chola III was stable and very prosperous up to 1215, but during his rule itself, the decline of the Chola power started following his defeat by Maravarman Sundara Pandiyan II in 1215–16. Subsequently, the Cholas also lost control of the island of Lanka and were driven out by the revival of Sinhala power.

In continuation of the decline, also marked by the resurgence of the Pandyan dynasty as the most powerful rulers in South India, a lack of a controlling central administration in its erstwhile-Pandyan territories prompted a number of claimants to the Pandya throne to cause a civil war in which the Sinhalas and the Cholas were involved by proxy. Details of the Pandyan civil war and the role played by the Cholas and Sinhalas, are present in the [Mahavamsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahavamsa) as well as the Pallavarayanpettai Inscriptions.

### Decline

The Cholas, under [Rajaraja Chola III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_Chola_III) and later, his successor Rajendra Chola III, were quite weak and therefore, experienced continuous trouble. One feudatory, the [Kadava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kadava) chieftain [Kopperunchinga I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kopperunchinga_I), even held Rajaraja Chola III as hostage for some time. At the close of the 12th century, the growing influence of the Hoysalas replaced the declining Chalukyas as the main player in the Kannada country, but they too faced constant trouble from the Seunas and the Kalachuris, who were occupying Chalukya capital because those empires were their new rivals. So naturally, the Hoysalas found it convenient to have friendly relations with the Cholas from the time of Kulothunga Chola III, who had defeated Hoysala Veera Ballala II, who had subsequent marital relations with the Chola monarch. This continued during the time of Rajaraja Chola III the son and successor of Kulothunga Chola III

The Hoysalas played a divisive role in the politics of the Tamil country during this period. They thoroughly exploited the lack of unity among the Tamil kingdoms and alternately supported one Tamil kingdom against the other thereby preventing both the Cholas and Pandyas from rising to their full potential. During the period of Rajaraja III, the Hoysalas sided with the Cholas and defeated the Kadava chieftain Kopperunjinga and the Pandyas and established a presence in the Tamil country. Rajendra Chola III who succeeded Rajaraja III was a much better ruler who took bold steps to revive the Chola fortunes. He led successful expeditions to the north as attested by his epigraphs found as far as Cuddappah. He also defeated two Pandya princes one of whom was Maravarman Sundara Pandya II and briefly made the Pandyas submit to the Chola overlordship. The Hoysalas, under Vira Someswara, were quick to intervene and this time they sided with the Pandyas and repulsed the Cholas in order to counter the latter's revival. The Pandyas in the south had risen to the rank of a great power who ultimately banished the Hoysalas from Malanadu or Kannada country, who were allies of the Cholas from Tamil country and the demise of the Cholas themselves ultimately was caused by the Pandyas in 1279. The Pandyas first steadily gained control of the Tamil country as well as territories in Sri Lanka, Chera country, Telugu country under Maravarman Sundara Pandiyan II and his able successor [Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jatavarman_Sundara_Pandyan) before inflicting several defeats on the joint forces of the Cholas under Rajaraja Chola III, and the Hoysalas under Someshwara, his son Ramanatha. The Pandyans gradually became major players in the Tamil country from 1215 and intelligently consolidated their position in Madurai-Rameswaram-Ilam-Cheranadu and Kanyakumari belt, and had been steadily increasing their territories in the Kaveri belt between Dindigul-Tiruchy-Karur-Satyamangalam as well as in the Kaveri Delta i.e., Thanjavur-Mayuram-Chidambaram-Vriddhachalam-Kanchi, finally marching all the way up to Arcot—Tirumalai-Nellore-Visayawadai-Vengi-Kalingam belt by 1250.

The Pandyas steadily routed both the Hoysalas and the Cholas. They also dispossessed the Hoysalas, by defeating them under Jatavarman Sundara Pandiyan at Kannanur Kuppam. At the close of Rajendra's reign, the Pandyan empire was at the height of prosperity and had taken the place of the Chola empire in the eyes of the foreign observers. The last recorded date of Rajendra III is 1279. There is no evidence that Rajendra was followed immediately by another Chola prince. The Hoysalas were routed from Kannanur Kuppam around 1279 by Kulasekhara Pandiyan and in the same war the last Chola emperor Rajendra III was routed and the Chola empire ceased to exist thereafter. Thus, the Chola empire was completely overshadowed by the Pandyan empire and sank into obscurity and ceased to exist by the end of the 13th century. However, only the Chola dynasty in India was extinguished but it survived elsewhere. According to Cebuano oral legends, a rebel branch of the Chola dynasty continued to survive in the Philippines up until the 16th Century, a local Malayo-Tamil Indianized kingdom called the [Rajahnate of Cebu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajahnate_of_Cebu) which settled in the island of [Cebu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cebu) which was founded by Rajamuda [Sri Lumay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lumay) who was half Tamil, half Malay. He was born in the previously Chola occupied Srivijaya. He was sent by the [Maharajah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maharajah) to establish a base for expeditionary forces, but he rebelled and established his own independent rajahnate. The Indianized kingdom flourished until its eventual conquest by Conquistador [Miguel Lopez de Legaspi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miguel_Lopez_de_Legaspi), who with his Spanish and Latino soldiers had sailed to the Philippines from Mexico.

## **Administration and society**

### Chola territory

According to Tamil tradition, the Chola country comprised the region that includes the modern-day [Tiruchirapalli District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruchirapalli_District), [Tiruvarur District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruvarur_District), [Nagapattinam District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagapattinam_District), [Ariyalur District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariyalur_District), [Perambalur district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perambalur_district), [Pudukkottai district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pudukkottai_district), [Thanjavur District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_District) in [Tamil Nadu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu) and [Karaikal District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaikal_District). The river Kaveri and its tributaries dominate this landscape of generally flat country that gradually slopes towards the sea, unbroken by major hills or valleys. The river, which is also known as the Ponni (Golden) river, had a special place in the culture of Cholas. The annual floods in the Kaveri marked an occasion for celebration, known as [Adiperukku](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adiperukku), in which the whole nation took part.

Kaveripoompattinam on the coast near the Kaveri delta was a major port town. Ptolemy knew of this, which he called Khaberis, and the other port town of [Nagappattinam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagappattinam) as the most important centres of Cholas. These two towns became hubs of trade and commerce and attracted many religious faiths, including Buddhism. Roman ships found their way into these ports. Roman coins dating from the early centuries of the common era have been found near the Kaveri delta.

The other major towns were Thanjavur, Uraiyur and Kudanthai, now known as [Kumbakonam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumbakonam). After Rajendra Chola moved his capital to Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Thanjavur lost its importance.

### Government

In the age of the Cholas, the whole of South India was for the first time brought under a single government.

The Cholas' system of government was monarchical, as in the Sangam age. However, there was little in common between the local chiefdoms of the earlier period and the imperial-like states of Rajaraja Chola and his successors. Aside from the early capital at Thanjavur and the later on at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Kanchipuram and Madurai were considered to be regional capitals in which occasional courts were held. The king was the supreme leader and a benevolent authoritarian. His administrative role consisted of issuing oral commands to responsible officers when representations were made to him. Due to the lack of a legislature or a legislative system in the modern sense, the fairness of king's orders dependent on his morality and belief in Dharma. The Chola kings built temples and endowed them with great wealth. The temples acted not only as places of worship but also as centres of economic activity, benefiting the community as a whole. Some of the output of villages throughout the kingdom was given to temples that reinvested some of the wealth accumulated as loans to the settlements. The Chola Dynasty was divided into several provinces called [Mandalams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandalam) which were further divided into Valanadus and these Valanadus were sub-divided into units called Kottams or Kutrams. According to [Kathleen Gough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathleen_Gough), during the Chola period the [Vellalar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vellalar) were the "dominant secular aristocratic caste ... providing the courtiers, most of the army officers, the lower ranks of the kingdom's bureaucracy, and the upper layer of the peasantry".

Before the reign of Rajaraja Chola I huge parts of the Chola territory were ruled by hereditary lords and local princes who were in a loose alliance with the Chola rulers. Thereafter, until the reign of [Vikrama Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikrama_Chola) in 1133 CE when the Chola power was at its peak, these hereditary lords and local princes virtually vanished from the Chola records and were either replaced or turned into dependent officials. Through these dependent officials the administration was improved and the Chola kings were able to exercise a closer control over the different parts of the empire. There was an expansion of the administrative structure, particularly from the reign of Rajaraja Chola I onwards. The government at this time had a large land revenue department, consisting of several tiers, which was largely concerned with maintaining accounts. The assessment and collection of revenue were undertaken by corporate bodies such as the ur, nadu, sabha, nagaram and sometimes by local chieftains who passed the revenue to the centre. During the reign of Rajaraja Chola I, the state initiated a massive project of land survey and assessment and there was a reorganisation of the empire into units known as valanadus.

The order of the King was first communicated by the executive officer to the local authorities. Afterwards the records of the transaction were drawn up and attested by a number of witnesses who were either local magnates or government officers.

At local government level, every village was a self-governing unit. A number of villages constituted a larger entity known as a Kurram, Nadu or Kottam, depending on the area. A number of Kurrams constituted a valanadu.[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-FOOTNOTESastri2002150-130) These structures underwent constant change and refinement throughout the Chola period.

Justice was mostly a local matter in the Chola Empire; minor disputes were settled at the village level. Punishment for minor crimes were in the form of fines or a direction for the offender to donate to some charitable endowment. Even crimes such as manslaughter or murder were punished with fines. Crimes of the state, such as treason, were heard and decided by the king himself; the typical punishment in these cases was either execution or confiscation of property.

### Military

The Chola dynasty had a robust military, of which the king was the supreme commander. It had four elements, comprising the cavalry, the elephant corps, several divisions of infantry and a navy.[[121]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-FOOTNOTESakhujaSakhuja200988-133) There were regiments of bowmen and swordsmen while the swordsmen were the most permanent and dependable troops. The Chola army was spread all over the country and was stationed in local garrisons or military camps known as Kodagams. The elephants played a major role in the army and the dynasty had numerous [war elephants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_elephant). These carried houses or huge Howdahs on their backs, full of soldiers who shot arrows at long range and who fought with spears at close quarters.

The Chola rulers built several palaces and fortifications to protect their cities. The fortifications were mostly made up of bricks but other materials like stone, wood and mud were also used. According to the ancient Tamil text Silappadikaram, the Tamil kings defended their forts with catapults that threw stones, huge cauldrons of boiling water or molten lead, and hooks, chains and traps.

The soldiers of the Chola dynasty used weapons such as swords, bows, javelins, spears and shields which were made up of steel.  Particularly the famous [Wootz steel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wootz_steel), which has a long history in south India dating back to the period before the Christian era, seems also be used to produce weapons. The army consisted of people from different castes but the warriors of the [Kaikolar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaikolar) and [Vellalar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vellalar) castes played a prominent role.

The [Chola navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_navy) was the zenith of ancient India sea power. It played a vital role in the expansion of the empire, including the conquest of the Ceylon islands and naval raids on Srivijaya. The navy grew both in size and status during the medieval Cholas reign. The Chola admirals commanded much respect and prestige. The navy commanders also acted as diplomats in some instances. From 900 to 1100, the navy had grown from a small backwater entity to that of a potent power projection and diplomatic symbol in all of Asia, but was gradually reduced in significance when the Cholas fought land battles subjugating the Chalukyas of the Andhra-Kannada area in South India.

A martial art called [Silambam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silambam) was patronised by the Chola rulers. Ancient and medieval Tamil texts mention different forms of martial traditions but the ultimate expression of the loyalty of the warrior to his commander was a form of martial suicide called Navakandam. The medieval Kalingathu Parani text, which celebrates the victory of Kulothunga Chola I and his general in the battle for Kalinga, describes the practice in detail.

### Economy

Land revenue and trade tax were the main source of income. The Chola rulers issued their coins in gold, silver and copper. The Chola economy was based on three tiers—at the local level, agricultural settlements formed the foundation to commercial towns nagaram, which acted as redistribution centres for externally produced items bound for consumption in the local economy and as sources of products made by nagaram artisans for the international trade. At the top of this economic pyramid were the elite merchant groups (samayam) who organised and dominated the regions international maritime trade.

One of the main articles which were exported to foreign countries were cotton cloth. Uraiyur, the capital of the early Chola rulers, was a famous centre for cotton textiles which were praised by Tamil poets. The Chola rulers actively encouraged the weaving industry and derived revenue from it. During this period the weavers started to organise themselves into guilds. The weavers had their own residential sector in all towns. The most important weaving communities in early medieval times were the [Saliyar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saliya) and [Kaikolar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaikolar). During the Chola period silk weaving attained a high degree and [Kanchipuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanchipuram) became one of the main centres for silk.

Metal crafts reached its zenith during the 10th to 11th centuries because the Chola rulers like Chembian Maadevi extended their patronage to metal craftsmen. Wootz steel was a major export item.

The farmers occupied one of the highest positions in society. These were the Vellalar community who formed the nobility or the landed aristocracy of the country and who were economically a powerful group. Agriculture was the principal occupation for many people. Besides the landowners, there were others dependent on agriculture. The Vellalar community was the dominant secular aristocratic caste under the Chola rulers, providing the courtiers, most of the army officers, the lower ranks of the bureaucracy and the upper layer of the peasantry.

In almost all villages the distinction between persons paying the land-tax (iraikudigal) and those who did not was clearly established. There was a class of hired day-labourers who assisted in agricultural operations on the estates of other people and received a daily wage. All cultivable land was held in one of the three broad classes of tenure which can be distinguished as peasant proprietorship called vellan-vagai, service tenure and eleemosynary tenure resulting from charitable gifts. The vellan-vagai was the ordinary [ryotwari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryotwari) village of modern times, having direct relations with the government and paying a land-tax liable to revision from time to time. The vellan-vagai villages fell into two broad classes- one directly remitting a variable annual revenue to the state and the other paying dues of a more or less fixed character to the public institutions like temples to which they were assigned. The prosperity of an agricultural country depends to a large extent on the facilities provided for irrigation. Apart from sinking wells and excavating tanks, the Chola rulers threw mighty stone dams across the Kaveri and other rivers, and cut out channels to distribute water over large tracts of land. Rajendra Chola I dug near his capital an artificial lake, which was filled with water from the Kolerun and the Vellar rivers.

There existed a brisk internal trade in several articles carried on by the organised mercantile corporations in various parts of the country. The metal industries and the jewellers art had reached a high degree of excellence. The manufacture of sea-salt was carried on under government supervision and control. Trade was carried on by merchants organised in guilds. The guilds described sometimes by the terms nanadesis were a powerful autonomous corporation of merchants which visited different countries in the course of their trade. They had their own mercenary army for the protection of their merchandise. There were also local organisations of merchants called "nagaram" in big centres of trade like Kanchipuram and Mamallapuram.

### Hospitals

Hospitals were maintained by the Chola kings, whose government gave lands for that purpose. The Tirumukkudal inscription shows that a hospital was named after Vira Chola. Many diseases were cured by the doctors of the hospital, which was under the control of a chief physician who was paid annually 80 Kalams of paddy, 8 Kasus and a grant of land. Apart from the doctors, other remunerated staff included a nurse, barber (who performed minor operations) and a waterman.

The Chola queen Kundavai also established a hospital at Tanjavur and gave land for the perpetual maintenance of it.

### Society

During the Chola period several guilds, communities and castes emerged. The guild was one of the most significant institutions of south India and merchants organised themselves into guilds. The best known of these were the Manigramam and Ayyavole guilds though other guilds such as Anjuvannam and Valanjiyar were also in existence. The farmers occupied one of the highest positions in society. These were the Vellalar community who formed the nobility or the landed aristocracy of the country and who were economically a powerful group. The Vellalar community was the dominant secular aristocratic caste under the Chola rulers, providing the courtiers, most of the army officers, the lower ranks of the bureaucracy and the upper layer of the peasantry. The Vellalar were also sent to northern Sri Lanka by the Chola rulers as settlers. The Ulavar community were working in the field which was associated with agriculture and the peasants were known as Kalamar.

The [Kaikolar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaikolar) community were weavers and merchants but they also maintained armies. During the Chola period they had predominant trading and military roles. During the reign of the Imperial Chola rulers (10th-13th century) there were major changes in the temple administration and land ownership. There was more involvement of non-Brahmin elements in the temple administration. This can be attributed to the shift in money power. Skilled classes like the weavers and the merchant-class had become prosperous. Land ownership was no longer a privilege of the Brahmins (priest caste) and the Vellalar land owners.

There is little information on the size and the density of the population during the Chola reign. The stability in the core Chola region enabled the people to lead a productive and contented life. However, there were reports of widespread famine caused by natural calamities.

The quality of the inscriptions of the regime indicates a high level of literacy and education. The text in these inscriptions was written by court poets and engraved by talented artisans. Education in the contemporary sense was not considered important; there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that some village councils organised schools to teach the basics of reading and writing to children, although there is no evidence of systematic educational system for the masses. Vocational education was through hereditary training in which the father passed on his skills to his sons. Tamil was the medium of education for the masses; Religious monasteries (matha or gatika) were centres of learning and received government support.

### Foreign trade

The Cholas excelled in foreign trade and maritime activity, extending their influence overseas to China and Southeast Asia. Towards the end of the 9th century, southern India had developed extensive maritime and commercial activity. The south Indian guilds played a major role in interregional and overseas trade. The best known of these were the Manigramam and Ayyavole guilds who followed the conquering Chola armies. The encouragement by the Chola court furthered the expansion of Tamil merchant associations such as the Ayyavole and Manigramam guilds into Southeast Asia and China. The Cholas, being in possession of parts of both the west and the east coasts of peninsular India, were at the forefront of these ventures. The [Tang dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_dynasty) of China, the Srivijaya empire under the Sailendras, and the [Abbasid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid) Kalifat at [Baghdad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baghdad) were the main trading partners.

Some credit for the emergence of a world market must also go to the dynasty. It played a significant role in linking the markets of China to the rest of the world. The market structure and economic policies of the Chola dynasty were more conducive to a large-scale, cross-regional market trade than those enacted by the Chinese [Song Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Dynasty). A Chola record gives their rationale for engagement in foreign trade: "Make the merchants of distant foreign countries who import elephants and good horses attach to yourself by providing them with villages and decent dwellings in the city, by affording them daily audience, presents and allowing them profits. Then those articles will never go to your enemies."

Song dynasty reports record that an embassy from Chulian (Chola) reached the Chinese court in 1077, and that the king of the Chulian at the time, Kulothunga I, was called Ti-hua-kia-lo. This embassy was a trading venture and was highly profitable to the visitors, who returned with copper coins in exchange for articles of [tribute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribute), including glass and spices. Probably, the motive behind Rajendra's expedition to Srivijaya was the protection of the merchants' interests.

### Canals and water tanks

There was tremendous agrarian expansion during the rule of the imperial Chola Dynasty (c. 900-1270 AD) all over Tamil Nadu and particularly in the Kaveri Basin. Most of the canals of the Kaveri River belongs to this period e.g., Uyyakondan canal, Rajendran vaykkal, Sembian Mahadegvi vaykkal. There was a well-developed and highly efficient system of water management from the village level upwards. The increase in the royal patronage and also the number of devadana and bramadeya lands which increased the role of the temples and village assemblies in the field. Committees like eri-variyam (tank-committee) and totta-variam (garden committees) were active as also the temples with their vast resources in land, men and money. The water tanks that came up during the Chola period are too many to be listed here. But a few most outstanding may be briefly mentioned. Rajendra Chola built a huge tank named Solagangam in his capital city Gangaikonda Solapuram and was described as the liquid pillar of victory. About 16 miles long, it was provided with sluices and canals for irrigating the lands in the neighbouring areas. Another very large lake of this period, which even today seems an important source of irrigation was the Viranameri near Kattumannarkoil in South Arcot district founded by Parantaka Chola. Other famous lakes of this period are Madurantakam, Sundra-cholapereri, Kundavai-Pereri (after a Chola queen).

## **Cultural contributions**

Under the Cholas, the Tamil country reached new heights of excellence in [art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art), [religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion), [music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music) and [literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature). In all of these spheres, the Chola period marked the culmination of movements that had begun in an earlier age under the Pallavas. Monumental architecture in the form of majestic [temples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temples) and [sculpture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sculpture) in stone and [bronze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze) reached a finesse never before achieved in India.

The Chola conquest of Kadaram (Kedah) and Srivijaya, and their continued commercial contacts with the [Chinese Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid-Imperial_China), enabled them to influence the local cultures. Examples of the [Hindu cultural influence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Southeast_Asia) found today throughout the Southeast Asia owe much to the legacy of the Cholas. For example, the great temple complex at [Prambanan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prambanan) in Indonesia exhibit a number of similarities with the South Indian architecture.

According to the Malay chronicle Sejarah Melayu, the rulers of the [Malacca sultanate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malacca_sultanate) claimed to be descendants of the kings of the Chola Empire. Chola rule is remembered in Malaysia today as many princes there have names ending with Cholan or Chulan, one such being [Raja Chulan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raja_Chulan), the Raja of [Perak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perak).

### Art and architecture

The Cholas continued the temple-building traditions of the Pallava dynasty and contributed significantly to the Dravidian temple design. They built a number of [Shiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva) temples along the banks of the river Kaveri. The template for these and future temples was formulated by Aditya I and Parantaka. The Chola temple architecture has been appreciated for its magnificence as well as delicate workmanship, ostensibly following the rich traditions of the past bequeathed to them by the Pallava Dynasty. Architectural historian [James Fergusson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Fergusson_(architect)) says that "the Chola artists conceived like giants and finished like jewelers". A new development in Chola art that characterised the Dravidian architecture in later times was the addition of a huge gateway called gopuram to the enclosure of the temple, which had gradually taken its form and attained maturity under the Pandya Dynasty. The Chola school of art also spread to Southeast Asia and influenced the architecture and art of Southeast Asia.

Temple building received great impetus from the conquests and the genius of Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola I. The maturity and grandeur to which the Chola architecture had evolved found expression in the two temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. The magnificent [Shiva temple of Thanjavur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadisvara_Temple), completed around 1009, is a fitting memorial to the material achievements of the time of Rajaraja. The largest and tallest of all Indian temples of its time, it is at the apex of South Indian architecture. The temple of Gangaikondacholisvaram at [Gangaikondacholapuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangaikondacholapuram), the creation of Rajendra Chola, was intended to excel its predecessor. Completed around 1030, only two decades after the temple at Thanjavur and in the same style, the greater elaboration in its appearance attests the more affluent state of the Chola Empire under Rajendra. The Brihadisvara Temple, the temple of Gangaikondacholisvaram and the [Airavatesvara Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airavatesvara_Temple)at [Darasuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darasuram) were declared as [World Heritage Sites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) by the [UNESCO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO) and are referred to as the [Great living Chola temples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Living_Chola_Temples).

The Chola period is also remarkable for its sculptures and bronzes. Among the existing specimens in museums around the world and in the temples of South India may be seen many fine figures of Shiva in various forms, such as [Vishnu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu) and his consort [Lakshmi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshmi), and the Shaivite saints. Though conforming generally to the iconographic conventions established by long tradition, the sculptors worked with great freedom in the 11th and the 12th centuries to achieve a classic grace and grandeur. The best example of this can be seen in the form of [Nataraja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja) the Divine Dancer.

### Literature

The Imperial Chola era was the golden age of Tamil culture, marked by the importance of literature. Chola records cite many works, including the Rajarajesvara Natakam, Viranukkaviyam and Kannivana Puranam.

The revival of Hinduism from its nadir during the Kalabhras spurred the construction of numerous temples and these in turn generated Shaiva and Vaishnava devotional literature. Jain and Buddhist authors flourished as well, although in fewer numbers than in previous centuries. [Jivaka-chintamani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jivaka-chintamani) by [Tirutakkatevar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirutakkatevar) and Sulamani by Tolamoli are among notable works by non-Hindu authors. The grammarian [Buddhamitra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhamitra) wrote a text on Tamil grammar called Virasoliyam. Commentaries were written on the great text Tolkāppiyam which deals with grammar but which also mentions ethics of warfare. Periapuranam was another remarkable literary piece of this period. This work is in a sense a national epic of the Tamil people because it treats of the lives of the saints who lived in all parts of Tamil Nadu and belonged to all classes of society, men and women, high and low, educated and uneducated.[[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-Kulwant_Rai_Gupta_p.288-223)

[Kamban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamban) flourished during the reign of Kulothunga Chola III. His [Ramavataram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramavataram) (also referred to as Kambaramayanam) is an epic of Tamil literature, and although the author states that he followed [Valmiki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valmiki)'s [Ramayana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramayana), it is generally accepted that his work is not a simple translation or adaptation of the Sanskrit epic. He imports into his narration the colour and landscape of his own time; his description of [Kosala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosala) is an idealised account of the features of the Chola country.

[Jayamkondar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jayamkondar)'s masterpiece, Kalingattuparani, is an example of narrative poetry that draws a clear boundary between history and fictitious conventions. This describes the events during Kulothunga Chola I's war in Kalinga and depicts not only the pomp and circumstance of war, but the gruesome details of the field. The Tamil poet [Ottakuttan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottakoothar) was a contemporary of Kulothunga Chola I and served at the courts of three of Kulothunga's successors. Ottakuttan wrote Kulothunga Cholan Ula, a poem extolling the virtues of the Chola king.

Nannul is a Chola era work on Tamil grammar. It discusses all five branches of grammar and, according to Berthold Spuler, is still relevant today and is one of the most distinguished normative grammars of literary Tamil.

The period was in particular significant for the development of Telugu literature under the patronage of the rulers. It was the age in which the great Telugu poets Tikkana, Ketana, Marana and Somana enriched the literature with their contributions. Tikkana Somayaji wrote Nirvachanottara Ramayanamu and Andhra Mahabharatamu. Abhinava Dandi Ketana wrote Dasakumaracharitramu, Vijnaneswaramu and Andhra Bhashabhushanamu. Marana wrote Markandeya Purana in Telugu. Somana wrote Basava Purana. Tikkana is one of the kavitrayam who translated Mahabharata into Telugu language.

Of the devotional literature, the arrangement of the Shaivite canon into eleven books was the work of Nambi Andar Nambi, who lived close to the end of the 10th century. However, relatively few Vaishnavite works were composed during the Later Chola period, possibly because of the rulers' apparent animosity towards them.

### Cultural centres

Chola rulers took an active interest in the development of temple centres and used the temples to widen the sphere of their royal authority. They established educational institutions and hospitals around the temple, enhanced the beneficial aspects of the role of the temple, and projected the royalty as a very powerful and genial presence. A record of Virarajendra Chola's reign relates to the maintenance of a school in the Jananamandapa within the temple for the study of the Vedas, Sastras, Grammar, and Rupavatara, as well as a hostel for students. The students were provided with food, bathing oil on Saturdays, and oil for pups.[ A hospital named Virasolan was provided with fifteen beds for sick people. The items of expense set apart for their comforts are rice, a doctor, a surgeon, two maid servants for nursing the patients, and a general servant for the hospital.

### Religion

In general, Cholas were followers of Hinduism. They were not swayed by the rise of Buddhism and [Jainism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism) as were the kings of the Pallava and Pandya dynasties. Kocengannan, an Early Chola, was celebrated in both Sangam literature and in the Shaivite canon as a Hindu saint.

While the Cholas did build their largest and most important temple dedicated to [Shiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva), it can be by no means concluded that either they were followers of Shaivism only or that they were not favourably disposed to other faiths. This is borne out by the fact that the second Chola king, Aditya I (871–903 CE), built temples for Shiva and also for Vishnu. Inscriptions of 890 refer to his contributions to the construction of the Ranganatha Temple at [Srirangapatnam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srirangapatnam) in the country of the Western Gangas, who were both his feudatories and had connections by marriage with him. He also pronounced that the great temples of Shiva and the Ranganatha temple were to be the Kuladhanam of the Chola emperors.

Parantaka II was a devotee of the reclining Vishnu (Vadivu Azhagiya Nambi) at Anbil, on the banks of the Kaveri river on the outskirts of Tiruchy, to whom he gave numerous gifts and embellishments. He also prayed before him before his embarking on war to regain the territories in and around Kanchi and Arcot from the waning Rashtrakutas and while leading expeditions against both Madurai and Ilam (Sri Lanka). Parantaka I and Parantaka Chola II endowed and built temples for Shiva and Vishnu. Rajaraja Chola I patronised Buddhists and provided for the construction of the [Chudamani Vihara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chudamani_Vihara), a Buddhist monastery in [Nagapattinam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagapattinam), at the request of Sri Chulamanivarman, the Srivijaya Sailendra king.

During the period of the Later Cholas, there are alleged to have been instances of intolerance towards [Vaishnavites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavite)[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-FOOTNOTEStein1998134-243) especially towards their acharya, [Ramanuja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramanuja). A Chola sovereign called Krimikanta Chola is said to have persecuted Ramanuja. Some scholars identify [Kulothunga Chola II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulothunga_Chola_II) with Krimikanta Chola or worm-necked Chola, so called as he is said to have suffered from cancer of the throat or neck. The latter finds mention in the [vaishnava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavite) Guruparampara and is said to have been a strong opponent of the vaishnavas. The work Parpannamritam (17th century) refers to the Chola king called Krimikanta who is said to have removed the Govindaraja idol from the Chidambaram [Nataraja temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja_Temple,_Chidambaram).[[232]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chola_dynasty#cite_note-245) However, according to "Koil Olugu" (temple records) of the [Srirangam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ranganathaswamy_Temple,_Srirangam) temple, Kulottunga Chola II was the son of Krimikanta Chola. The former, unlike his father, is said to have been a repentant son who supported vaishnavism. Ramanuja is said to have made Kulottunga II as a disciple of his nephew, [Dasarathi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudaliyandan). The king then granted the management of the Ranganathaswamy temple to Dasarathi and his descendants as per the wish of Ramanuja. Historian [Nilakanta Sastri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nilakanta_Sastri) identifies Krimikanta Chola with [Adhirajendra Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athirajendra_Chola) or [Virarajendra Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virarajendra_Chola) with whom the main line ([Vijayalaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayalaya_Chola)line) ended. There is an inscription from 1160 AD which states that the custodians of Shiva temples who had social intercourses with Vaishnavites would forfeit their property. However, this is more of a direction to the Shaivite community by its religious heads than any kind of dictat by a Chola emperor. While Chola kings built their largest temples for Shiva and even while emperors like Rajaraja Chola I held titles like Sivapadasekharan, in none of their inscriptions did the Chola emperors proclaim that their clan only and solely followed Shaivism or that Shaivism was the state religion during their rule.

The Chola dynasty has inspired many Tamil authors. The most important work of this genre is the popular [Ponniyin Selvan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ponniyin_Selvan)(The son of Ponni), a historical novel in [Tamil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language) written by [Kalki Krishnamurthy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalki_Krishnamurthy). Written in five volumes, this narrates the story of Rajaraja Chola, dealing with the events leading up to the ascension of [Uttama Chola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttama_Chola) to the Chola throne. Kalki had used the confusion in the succession to the Chola throne after the demise of Parantaka Chola II. The book was serialised in the Tamil periodical [Kalki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalki_(Tamil_magazine)) during the mid-1950s. The serialisation lasted for nearly five years and every week its publication was awaited with great interest.

Kalki's earlier historical romance, [Parthiban Kanavu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthiban_Kanavu), deals with the fortunes of the imaginary Chola prince Vikraman, who was supposed to have lived as a feudatory of the Pallava king [Narasimhavarman I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narasimhavarman_I) during the 7th century. The period of the story lies within the interregnum during which the Cholas were in decline before Vijayalaya Chola revived their fortunes. Parthiban Kanavu was also serialised in the Kalki weekly during the early 1950s.

[Sandilyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandilyan), another popular Tamil novelist, wrote Kadal Pura in the 1960s. It was serialised in the Tamil weekly [Kumudam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumudam). Kadal Pura is set during the period when Kulothunga Chola I was in exile from the Vengi kingdom after he was denied the throne. It speculates the whereabouts of Kulothunga during this period. Sandilyan's earlier work, [Yavana Rani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yavana_Rani), written in the early 1960s, is based on the life of Karikala Chola.  More recently, [Balakumaran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balakumaran) wrote the novel [Udaiyar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Udayar_(novel)), which is based on the circumstances surrounding Rajaraja Chola's construction of the Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur.

There were stage productions based on the life of Rajaraja Chola during the 1950s and in 1973 [Sivaji Ganesan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sivaji_Ganesan) acted in a screen adaptation of a play titled [Rajaraja Cholan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajaraja_Cholan). The Cholas are featured in the [History of the World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_World_(board_game)) board game, produced by [Avalon Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avalon_Hill).

The Cholas were the subject of the 2010 Tamil-language movie [Aayirathil Oruvan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aayirathil_Oruvan_(2010_film)).