

Imperial Cholas, Rise, Expansion and Legacy of the Chola Empire

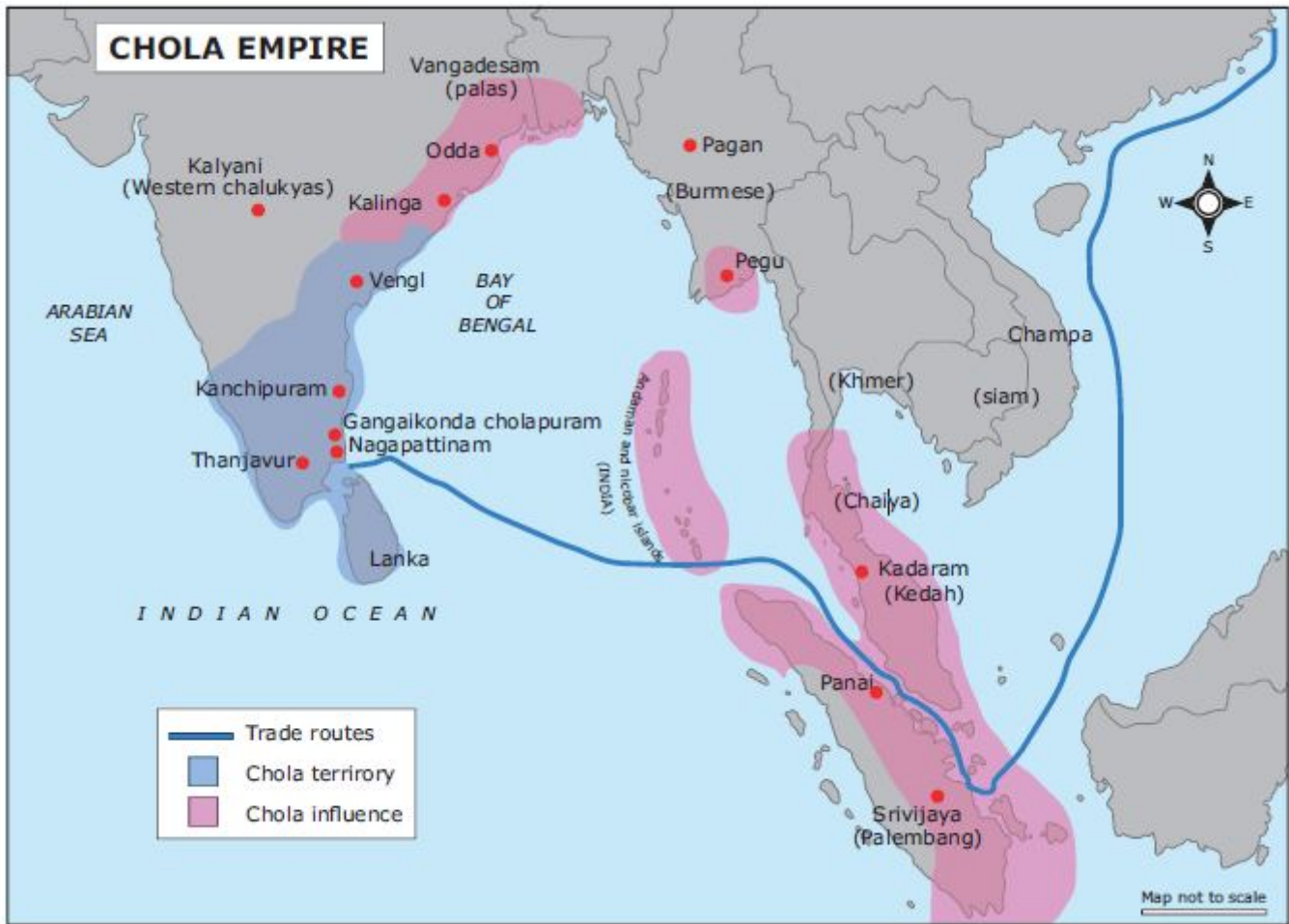
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Emergence of Imperial Cholas

The Cholas belonged to one of the three mighty dynasties that ruled the Tamil country in the early **Sangam period**. Described as the **Muvendhar** in the Sangam literature, they were known for their valour and patronage of the Tamil language.

- They **became prominent in the ninth century** and established an empire comprising a significant portion of **South India**.
- They also extended their sway in **Sri Lanka and the Malay Peninsula**. Therefore, they are called the Imperial Cholas.



Map: Chola Empire

Chola - Rulers and their Contributions

Chola - Rulers and their Contributions	
Period: 850 - 1279 AD	Capital: Tanjore (Thanjavur)
- Cholas remained subordinate to the Pallavas in the Kaveri region after the Sangam period. - They re-emerged with Vijayalaya (850-871 CE), conquering the Kaveri delta from Muttaraiyar. Sources: Inscriptions engraved on copper and stone form the primary sources for studying Chola history.	

Vijayalaya (847 - 871 AD)	• Founder of Chola Empire: He captured Tanjore from Muttaraiyars in 815 A.D. and built a temple of Durga. ◦ He built the city of Thanjavur and established the Chola kingdom of the imperial line in 850. • Sources: Kanyakumari inscription mentions the renovation of the city of Tanjore by Vijayala.
Aditya (871 - 907 AD)	• Military conquests: He ended the Pallava kingdom by defeating Aparajita and annexing Tondaimandalam. • He maintained cordial relations with Cheras.

**Parantaka I
(907 - 955
AD)**

- **Title and**

Sources: He

assumed the “

Madurain-

konda” after

capturing Pandya

capital Madurai.

- **Uthiramerur**

Inscriptions

belong to

his reign,

which gives

a detailed

account of

the **village**

administration

under the

Cholas.

- **Military**

conflicts:

- **Battle of**

Vellore: He

defeated the

Pandya

ruler

Rajasimha

II and the

Kassapa V of

Ceylon in

the Battle of

Vellore.

- **Battle of**

Vallala: He

defeated

Rashtrakuta

ruler

Krishna II

in Deccan in

the Battle of

Vallala.

- **Battle of**

Takkolam:

He was

defeated by

Rashtrakutas

in 948, and

his eldest

son

Rajaditya

**Period of
rapid
ascension
(955 - 987
AD):**

- From the death of Parantaka I to the ascension of Rajaraja I, this period of thirty years was marked by the **rapid ascension to the Chola throne.**
- **Rulers after Parantaka I:**
 - **Gandaraditya Chola (955 - 956 AD):**
Second son of Parantaka
 - **Arinjaya Chola (957- 958 AD):**
Younger brother of Gandaraditya
 - **Parantaka II Chola (958 - 973 AD):** He was son of Arijinya. He defeated the Pandyas and Ceylon and then recaptured the Tondaimandalam from Rashtrakutas.
 - **Uttama Chola (973 - 985 AD):**
He was the son of Gandaraditya, who ascended the throne after the assassination of Aditya II.

**Rajaraja I
(985 - 1014
AD)**

- **Succession:**

Rajaraja I is the most celebrated of the Chola kings. He was the **son of Parantaka II** and ascended the Chola throne in 985 AD.

- **Religion:** He was a

devout follower of **Saivism** but tolerant towards other faiths.

- **Titles: Kandalur**

salai kalamarutt

a, Jayankonda, Sivapadasekara,

Mummudi-Chola

(the Chola king who wears three crowns - the Chera, Chola and Pandya),

Pandya Kulashani

(Thunderbolt to the Race of the Pandyas).

- **His military**

conquests were:

- **Against**

Cheras: He defeated the Chera ruler

Bhaskararavivarma

in the naval battle of Kandalursalai in 994 AD.

- **Against**

Pandyas:

He defeated the Pandya ruler,

Amarabhujanga

and established the Chola authority in the Pandya

country.

**Rajendra I
(1012-1044
A.D.)**

- **Succession:**
Rajendra I was the **co-regent** during the reign of Rajaraja I. He ascended to the **throne in 1012 AD.**
- **Religion:** He was a devout **follower of Siva.** But he was also tolerant towards the **Vaishnava** and **Buddhist** sects.
- **Matrimonial relations:** He gave his daughter **Ammangadevi** to the Vengi Chalukya prince and further continued the matrimonial alliance initiated by Rajaraja I.
- **Policy of aggression:** He continued his father's policy of aggressive conquests and expansion.
- **Titles:**
Mudikondan,
Gangaikondan,
Kadaram Kondan
and Pandita Cholan
- **His important conquests were:**
He led a successful 16 military campaign against the kingdom of Srivijaya, the powerful maritime State, which ruled the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and the

Rajadhiraja (1044 - 1052 AD)	• Succession: Rajadhiraja was the son of Rajendra I and ascended to the throne in 1044. • Titles: Jayamkonda Solan (The Victorious Cholan), Kalyanapuramkonda, Vijaya Rajendra Cholan. • War against Chalukyas: He lost his life at the battle of Koppam against the western Chalukyan King Someshwar. ◦ He was known as Yanai-mel-thunjina Devar (the king who died on an elephant).
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**Rajendra II
(1052 - 1063
AD)**

- **Succession:** He was the younger **brother of Rajadhiraja** and ascended the throne after the death of Rajadhiraja in the battle of Koppam in 1052. He **led the Battle of Koppam** afterwards.
- **Military achievements:**
 - He defeated the western Chalukyan king **Someshwar** in the **Battle of Kundal-Sangamam** in 1062.
 - He undertook expeditions to the Kalinga Kingdom (Kalinga King **Vira Salamegha**) and Sri Lanka (Vijayabahu I).
- **Contribution to architecture:**
 - **Ulagalantha Perumal** Temple (Tamilnadu) and **Veetrirundha Perumal Temple** were expanded

Virarajendra Chola (1063 - 1067 AD)	Military conquests: • He occupied Vengi after defeating Someshwar I and Vikramaditya VI (son of Someshwara I) of Western Chalukyas. ◦ He defeated Someshwar II (son of Someshwara I). • He led expeditions against Sri Lanka (King Vijaybahu) and Kadaram (on behalf of a king).
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Kulottunga I (1070 - 1122 AD)	• Succession: Kulottunga I was the grandson of Rajendra I through his daughter Ammangadevi. He succeeded the Chola throne after the Athirajendra Chola. • Military achievements: He united the Vengi kingdom with the Chola Empire. ◦ He defeated Kalinga king Anantavarman Chodaganga. • Contemporaries: Kamban and Jayakonda were the scholars in his court. • Foreign relations: Kulottunga I sent a large embassy of 72 merchants to China and maintained cordial relations with the kingdom of Sri Vijaya.
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Later rulers	• Rulers after Kulothunga I were weak and could not maintain the Chola empire. • Rajendra III was the last Chola king who Pandya King Jatavarman Sundarapandya II defeated.
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Administration

Administration	
Central Government	• Hereditary monarchical power: The emperor or king was at the head of the administration. The council of ministers assisted him. ◦ Perundanam and sirudanam: They were the administrative machinery comprising various officials. ◦ Cholas appointed Brahmins as spiritual preceptors or rajagurus. • Chola kings followed the practice of adding the suffix deva to the name of the crowned kings at the time of the coronation. • They provided extensive grants to the temples to reveal the king's authority.
Provincial Administration	• Feudatory system: Chola ruler followed the system of feudatories • Division of the Chola Empire: Empire into mandalams (under royal princes or officers) → mandalam into valanadus (under periyannattar) → valanadus into nadus (under nattar). ◦ In each nadu there were a number of autonomous villages. • Town: The town was known as nagaram, and it was under the administration of a council called nagarattar. ◦ Naattukanakku and nattuvijavan: They were the functionaries for recording the proceedings of the Nattar.

Village Assemblies

- **Village autonomy:** The system of village autonomy with sabhas and their committees developed through the ages and reached its culmination during the Chola rule.
- **Sources: Uttamerur inscription** provides details of the formation and functions of village councils.
 - **Ur:** It was a general assembly of the village
 - **Urar:** They were the landholders in the village entrusted with the upkeep of temples and maintenance of the tanks.
 - **Agraharams:** It was the gathering of adult men in Brahmin villages.
- **Village council:** Each village was divided into thirty wards, and each was to nominate its members to the village council.
 - **The qualifications to become a ward member were:**
 - Ownership of at least one-fourth veli of the land.
 - own residence.
 - Above thirty years and below seventy years of age.
 - Knowledge of Vedas.
 - However, certain norms of disqualification were also mentioned in the inscriptions. They were:
 - Had been members of the committee for the past three years.
 - failed to submit accounts as committee members.
 - Committed sins
 - stolen the property of others.
 - **Kudavolai system** was the system of nominating the persons for each ward for a year.
 - **Division of wards into six variyams:** samvatsaravariyam, erivariyam, thotta variyam, pancha variyam, pon variyam and puravuvuri variyam.
 - **Variyapperumakkal:** They were the committee members who usually met in the temple or under a tree and passed resolutions.

Military Administration	• Military composition: ◦ Cavalry: kudirai sevagar ◦ Elephant corps: anaiyatka ◦ Bowmen: villaligal ◦ Sword-bearers: valilar ◦ Spearmen: kondubar • Other terms related to military administration ◦ Nilaipadai: Military outposts in the conquered territory. ◦ Nayagam: The captain of a regiment, and later he assumed the title of padaimudali. ◦ Senapati and dandanayagam: The commander-in-chief. ◦ Kaikkolaperumdai: Royal troops. ◦ Velaikkarar: A personal troop to defend the king. ◦ Kadagams and padaividu: Army and military cantonments.
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Economy

Economy	
Agriculture	• Expansion of agriculture: It was the period of the expansion of agriculture that led to the production of food grain surplus. ◦ Valangai: Group of agricultural castes. ◦ Kudi neekki: The local peasants

Revenue	• Revenue collection: They undertook extensive land surveys and revenue settlements. Cholas did the collection of land tax out of the agrarian surplus for its revenue. ◦ The tax rates were fixed depending on the soil's fertility and the landholder's status. • Exemption: Temples and Brahmins were exempted from paying taxes. • Various taxes: Irai, kanikadan, iraikattina-kanikadan and kadami. ◦ Kudimai: A tax paid by the cultivating tenants to the government and the landlords, the bearers of honorific titles such as udaiyan, araiyan and kilavar. ◦ Opati: It was levied and collected by the king and local chiefs. ◦ Iraikattina-nellu: tax paid in kind. • Related terms: ◦ Puravuvvari-tinaikkalam: Department of land revenue (chief - puravuvvari-tinaikkalanayagam). ◦ Naduvagaiseykira: The surveyors of the land, who were from the landholding communities. ◦ Units of the land measurement: kuli, ma, veli, patti, padagam, etc. ◦ kalam: Unit for collecting paddy as a tax (28 kg).
Irrigation	• Measures: Cholas undertook measures to improve the irrigation system that was in practice. ◦ They practiced the turn system for distributing the water. • Vativaykkal: ◦ It was a criss-cross channel, a traditional way of harnessing rainwater in the Kavery delta. ◦ Vati is a drainage channel (in the north-south direction), and a vaykkal is a supply channel (in the east-west direction). ▪ Uttamacholavaykkal, Panca-vanamadevi-vaykkal and Ganavathy-vaykkal: Canals named after kings, queens and gods. ▪ Ur-vaykkal: Canal owned jointly by the landowners. ▪ Nattu-vaykkal: Nadu level canals. • Irrigation tanks: Cholavaridhi, Kaliyaneri, Vairamegatataka and Rajendra Cholaperiyaeri. ◦ Ainutruvapperari was an irrigation tank constructed by Valanciyar, a group of traders in Pudukottai.

Water Management	• Water rights: They had a system of assigning different kinds of water rights. ◦ Land transactions in the form of donations and endowments were also accompanied by water rights. • Practice of free labour: The practice of free labour for the periodic and seasonal maintenance of the irrigation tanks was prevalent. ◦ Vetti and Amanji: Forms of free labour related to public works at the village level. • Related terms: ◦ Nirkkiintavaru: It relates to the allotment of water. ◦ Kumizh and talaivay: Channels and gateways for releasing the water. ◦ Talaivayar, Talaivay-chanrar and Eri-araiyarkal: They were the groups responsible for releasing the water through the head channel and sluice from the rivers or tanks. ◦ Kulattar: They are a group of people in charge of kulam. ◦ Ernakulam: Commonly owned village tank (our tank). ◦ Eriyam: A tax collected by village assemblies, which was utilised for repairing irrigation tanks.
Artisanal activities	• Development of weaving industry: The weaving industry, particularly the silk weaving at Kanchi, flourished. ◦ Idangai: Artisanal and trading caste groupings. • The metal works developed owing to the great demand for images for temples and utensils.
Trade	• Increased trade: Increased production in agriculture and artisanal activities led to the growth in trade. • Terms related to traders: ◦ Garveras and Gaudas/ Gavundas: Trading castes. ◦ Anjuvannattar: They were maritime traders comprising West Asians, including Jews, Christians and Muslims, who settled along the port towns of the West coast. ◦ Manigramattar: They were traders in the hinterland and settled in interior towns like Kodumbalur, Uraiyur, Kovilpatti, Piranmalai and others. ▪ Ainutruvar, disai-ayirattu-ainutruvar and valanciyar: Common banner for Anjuvannattar and Manigramattar after both merged. • Maritime trade centres: Munai-santai (Pudukkottai), Mylapore and Tiruvotriyur (Chennai), Nagapattinam, Vishakapattinam and Krishnapattinam (south Nellore). ◦ Peruvazhis: Trunk roads. • Items of export: Sandalwood, ebony, condiments, precious gems, pepper, oil, paddy, grains and salt. • Items of import: Camphor, copper, tin, mercury, etc.

Society and Religion

Society:

- **Social structure:**
 - **Prevalence of Varnashrama system:** Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sutras.
 - **Valangai and Idangai castes** were two major divisions among the castes.
 - Landholding was the **prime determinant of social status** and hierarchy.
 - **Hierarchy according to landownership:** Brahmadeya-kilavars > landholders of vellanvagai villages > Ulukudi
 - **Brahmadeya-kilavars:** They were the Brahmin landholders at the top brahmadeya settlements with tax exemption, displacing the local peasants.
 - **Ulukudi:** They were the tenants who could not own land but had to cultivate the lands of Brahmins and holders of vellanvagai villages.
 - **Melvaram:** significant share in harvest retained by landholders and **kizh varam:** lower share of harvest retained by Ulukudi.
 - **Labourers (paniceymakkal) and slaves (adimaigal)** stayed at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
- **Women:** There was no improvement in the position of women.
 - The **practice of 'sati'** was prevalent among the royal families.
 - The **devadasi system**, or dancing girls attached to temples, emerged during this period.

Religion:

- **Ardent followers of Shaivism:** The iconic form of Siva was Lingodhbhava, and the **Nataraja idol** was the human form.
- **Flourishment of Saivism and Vaishnavism:** Many popular saints called **Nayannars** and **Alvars**, who were devotees of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, respectively, flourished during this period.
- **Parantaka I and Uttama Chola (907-970)** made provisions and gifted the lands to promote religion.

Imperial Cholas UPSC PYQs

Q1: Who among the following led a successful 16 military campaign against the kingdom of Srivijaya, the powerful maritime State, which ruled the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and the neighbouring islands? (**UPSC Prelims 2025**)

- a) Amoghavarsha (Rashtrakuta)
- b) Prataparudra (Kakatiya)
- c) Rajendra I (Chola)
- d) Vishnuvardhana (Hoysala)

Ans: (c)

