

Imperial Cholas: Art, Architecture and Literature

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Chola Architecture

Chola architecture was a continuation of the Pallava architecture, with some variations. Under the patronage of the Chola rulers, temple architecture **reached its zenith**.

- Cholas used material of **stone instead of bricks** due to its greater durability.
- Temples built under Aditya and Parantaka contained only three niches in the shrine walls, one on each wall, and two niches in the walls of the ardhmandapa, again one on each wall.
- **The practice of building temples** with the patronage of Chola kings and queens was more prevalent.
- **Devadana** was the land gifted to the temples, exempted from tax.

Chola architecture

Features of Chola temples

- **Boundary walls:** Chola temples had high boundary walls surrounding the temple.
- **Vimana:** The vimanas rose above the sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) of the temple in the form of a stepped pyramid that rises up linearly rather than curved. There was only **one vimana** on top of the main temple.
- **Gopurama:** The front wall had a high entrance gateway known as gopuram.
- **Panchayatan style:** The temple premise was laid out in panchayatan style with a **principal temple and four subsidiary shrines**.
- **Shikhara:** The crowning element is shaped like **an octagon** and is known as shikhara.
- **Antarala:** It is the vestibular tunnel connecting the **assembly hall with the garbhagriha**.
- **Mandap:** It is a **pillared hall** with elaborately carved pillars and a flat roof.
- **Sculptures:** The **entrance of the garbhagriha** had statues of Dwaarpal, Mithun and Yaksha.
- **Water tank:** The water tank **inside the temple** enclosure was a unique feature of the Chola style.

Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram



- **Feature:** It is dedicated to **Lord Shiva**, but the Vaishnavite deity, **Lord Govindaraja** too is worshipped here.
 - Shiva is depicted in dancing form and is seen performing **“Ananda Tandava”** (dance of delight).
- **Patronage:** **Parantaka I** provided the **vimana of the famous Nataraja temple** at Chidambaram with a golden roof.

<u>Nageswaraswamy Temple</u> (Tamilnadu) 	• Feature: It is a Shiva temple in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu. ◦ It allows sunlight inside the temple, right on the sanctum, only during the Tamil month of Chithirai (April/May). • Aditya Chola built it during the 9th century.
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Rajarajeswara temple (Tanjore, Tamilnadu)



- It is also known as **Periya Kovil, Brihadeeshwara Temple and Rajarajesvaram.**
- **Patronage:** It was built by emperor **Raja Raja Chola I** and **completed in 1010 AD.**
- **Features:** It is one of the largest temples in India and is an example of **Dravidian architecture** during the Chola period.
 - **Material:** The entire temple structure is made out of **granite**.
 - **Depiction:** The **fresco paintings and the miniature sculptures** of the scenes from Puranas and epics in the temple walls reveal the religious ideology of the Chola rulers.
- **Significance:** It is part of the **UNESCO World Heritage Site** known as the "**Great Living Chola Temples**"; the other two are the **Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Airavatesvara Temples.**

Valisvara Temple (Tamilnadu) 	• Feature: It is a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. • Patronage: It was constructed in the early part of the 10th century AD by Raja Raja Chola I.
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	• Patronage: Rajendra I built Gangaikondacholapuram Temple in the newly founded city of Gangaikondacholapuram after his successful expedition to the Ganges. • Features: It is dedicated to Lord Shiva and has features similar to the Brihadeshwara Temple at Thanjavur. ◦ There are beautiful stone sculptures in the niches. Gangaikondacholapuram Temple (Tamilnadu)  ▪ Some of the stone sculptures on the niches - Nataraja, Dakshinamurthy, Harahari, Lingodbhava, Vishnu, Brahma, Mahishasuramardhini, Gnana Saraswathi, Chandes anugrahamurthi. • Significance: It is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the “Great Living Chola Temples”.
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Kampaheswarar Temple (Tamilnadu) 	• Feature: A Shiva temple of <u>Dravidian architecture</u> in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu. ◦ Shiva is worshipped as "Kampahareswarar" as he removed the quaking of a king who a Brahmarakshasa was haunting. • Patronage: It was built by Kulothunga Chola II.
Airavathesvara Temple Darasuram (Tamilnadu) 	• Feature: A Shiva temple of Dravidian architecture located in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu. ◦ It also reverentially displays Vaishnavism and Shaktism traditions of Hinduism, along with the legends associated with Nayanmars. ◦ Incidents from the Periyapuranam, in the form of miniatures, are depicted on the base of the temple's garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) wall. • Patronage: It was built by Rajaraja Chola II in the 12th century CE and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Chudamani Vihara (Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu) 	• Location: It was a Buddhist monastery in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu. • Patronage: It was built by Sri Vijayan King Sri Mara Vijayattunga Varman with the patronage of Rajaraja Chola I.
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Chola Art

Chola art		
Sculptures	• Feature: Chola sculptures adorned the walls and interiors of temples, showcasing the religious and spiritual beliefs of the Chola dynasty. • Themes: One of the distinctive features of Chola sculptures is the depiction of deities and mythological figures with dynamic poses and expressive facial features. • Sculpture making: Chola period bronzes were created using the lost wax technique. The bronze statue of Nataraja, or dancing Siva, is a masterpiece. ◦ They used the Panchaloham for melting, an alloy of bronze.	
	Nataraja Shiva 	• Shiva is dancing on the figure of a small dwarf. The dwarf symbolises ignorance and the ego of an individual. • The matted and flowing locks of Shiva represent the flow of the river Ganges. • In ornamentation, one ear of Shiva has a male earring while the other has a female. This represents the form of ardhanarishwar. • A snake is twisted around the arm of Shiva. The snake symbolises the kundalini power, which resides in the human spine in a dormant stage. If aroused, one can attain true consciousness. • The Nataraja is surrounded by a nimbus of glowing lights, symbolising the vast unending cycles of time.

Paintings	• Chola Paintings of South India are very significant in art. • Medium: Chola paintings were predominantly executed on walls, murals, and wooden panels, often adorning the interiors of temples. ◦ The walls of the Chola temples, such as the Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram temples, contain numerous icons of large size with fine execution • Uniqueness: The Chola paintings paid careful attention to facial expressions and hand gestures. ◦ The painting of Rajaraja Chola I, listening to his preceptor Karuvur Devar is a fine example. • Themes: The subjects of Chola paintings often revolved around deities such as Shiva and Vishnu. These paintings portrayed the gods in various forms and manifestations, showcasing their divine attributes, symbolism, and narratives.
Music and dance	• Great patron: The Chola kings, especially Rajaraja Chola I, were great connoisseurs of music and dance. ◦ Rajaraja I was instrumental in bringing back tevaram music to temples. • Uniqueness: The representation of Nataraja or Adal Vallan (king of dance) in the form of the idol was the motif of Tamil music, dance and drama with hymns composed by Nayanmars. ◦ Oduvars and Padikam Paduvars: They were appointed to sing in the temples to recite Thirumurai (The Saiva canon). ◦ Vinnappamseivar: They were the singers of hymns. • Musical education: Musicians and dance masters were appointed to train the girls. ◦ Theli-cheri-pennugal: They were the dancers.
Coins	• Coins: Chola's coinage issues were in all three metals, Gold, Silver and Copper. • Commemorative coins: ◦ Uttama Chola struck silver with the royal emblem of "Tiger facing two fishes" on the obverse and the Nagari legend "Uttama Chola". ◦ The Chola King Raja Raja I coins had the standing king on one side and the seated goddess on the other side, with inscriptions generally in Sanskrit. ◦ Rajendra I's coins had the legend 'Sri Rajendra' or 'Gangaikonda Chola' inscribed with the emblems of tiger and fish.

Chola Literature

Education was given importance. Besides the temples and mathas as educational centres. Apart from the Vedas and Epics, subjects like mathematics and medicine were taught in these institutions. This resulted in the development of Tamil literature, which peaked during the Chola period.

- **Saiva Siddhanta:** It was a highly evolved philosophical system founded during this period.

Author	Literary work	Context
Thiruthakkadevar	Sivakasintamani	is the Story of a prince who is the perfect master of all arts
Kamban	Ramavataram (Kamban Ramayana).	It is the Tamil version of Ramayana based on Valmiki's Ramayana.
Sekkilar	Periyapuramam (Tiruttontarpuranam)	depicts the lives of the sixty-three Nayanars, the canonical poets of Tamil Shaivism.
Jayakondar	Kalingattupparani	It describes the Kalinga war fought by Kulotunga I.
Ottakuthur	Moovarula	It shows the life of three Chola kings (Vikrama Chola, Kulothunga Chola II and Rajaraja Chola II).
Pugalendi	Nalavenba	is the story of King Nala and Princess Damayanti.
Meikandar	Sivagnana Bodham	The foundational text of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.
Kalladar	Kalladam	Tamil grammar
Amirthasagarar	Yapperungalam	Tamil grammar
Pavanandhi	Nannul	Tamil grammar
Buddhamitra	Virasoliyam	Tamil grammar
Kesava Swami	Nannaranava Samkshevam	Sanskrit work

Inscriptions

During the Chola period, numerous inscriptions were made on various surfaces, providing valuable historical and cultural insights into the dynasty's reign. Most of their inscriptions are written in Tamil; some are in Sanskrit and others in Grantha.

- **Temple inscriptions:** The Chola dynasty was known for its extensive patronage of temple construction and renovation.
 - Inscriptions discovered in a **Shiva temple located at Visalur village** in Koluthur taluk throw much light on the Chola administration in this region.
 - **Brihadeshwara Temple** is the only temple in India where the king specifically talks in an inscription that he built the temple only with stones (**katrali**).
- **Uttaramerur inscriptions:**
 - It speaks about Parantaka I and his victory over Madurai.
 - It gives details of the process of electing members to various committees that administered the affairs of a Brahmin settlement.
- **Thiruvallangudi inscription:** It mentions the Chola attack on Vizhinjam.
- **Cholapuram inscription:** It mentions the retreat of Kulothunga Cholan to Kottattu.

- The inscription at **Ennayiram, Thirumukkudal and Thirubhuvanai** provide details of the **colleges** that existed in these places.

Decline of Cholas

The Chola dynasty was paramount in South India from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. By the end of the twelfth century, local chiefs began to grow in prominence, which weakened the centre.

- **Weak rulers:** Rulers after **Kulothunga I** were weak and could not maintain the huge empire of Cholas.
- **Frequent invasions:** Invasions of Pandyas weakened the Cholas with fragmented territories.
 - In 1264, the Pandyan ruler, **Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan I**, sacked the Chola's capital of Gangaikonda Chozhapuram.
 - The Chola dynasty ended when **King Maravarman Kulasekara Pandyan I** defeated the last king Rajendra Chola III in 1279 AD and established the rule by Pandyas.

Kanchipuram was lost to the **Telugu Cholas**, while the remaining Chola territories were lost to the Pandyan king.

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