



IMPERIAL CHOLAS

Class 11th Tamil Nadu Book

Chapter 14

LESSON 13

IMPERIAL CHOLAS

Learning Objectives

Students will acquire knowledge about

- 1. A brief history of early Cholas.*
- 2. Military conquests and other achievements of Rajaraja I.*
- 3. Campaigns of Rajendra I and his accomplishments.*
- 4. Salient features of the Chola administration.*
- 5. Literature, Art and architecture of the Cholas.*

After the decline of the Sangam period, the Cholas became feudatories in Uraiyur. They became prominent in the ninth century and established an empire comprising the major portion of South India. Their capital was Tanjore. They also extended their sway in Sri Lanka and the Malay Peninsula. Therefore, they are called as the Imperial Cholas. Thousands of inscriptions found in the temples provide detailed information regarding the administration, society, economy and culture of the Chola period.

The founder of the Imperial Chola line was Vijayalaya. He captured Tanjore from Muttaraiyars in 815 A.D. and built a temple for Durga. His son Aditya put an end to the Pallava kingdom by defeating Aparajita and annexed Tondaimandalam. Parantaka I was one of the important early Chola rulers. He defeated the Pandyas and the ruler of Ceylon. But he suffered a defeat at the hands of the Rashtrakutas in the famous battle of Takkolam. Parantaka I was a great builder of temples. He also provided the *vimana* of the famous

Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with a golden roof. The two famous Uttiramerur inscriptions that give a detailed account of the village administration under the Cholas belong to his reign. After a gap of thirty years, the Cholas regained their supremacy under Rajaraja I.

Rajaraja I (985 – 1014 A.D.)

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

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



STATUE OF
RAJARAJA

7. Rajaraja's last military achievement was a naval expedition against the Maldiv Islands which were conquered.

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

Rajendra I (1012-1044 A.D.)

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

1. Mahinda V, the king of Sri Lanka attempted to recover from the Cholas the northern part of Ceylon. Rajendra defeated him and seized the southern Sri Lanka. Thus the whole of Sri Lanka was made part of the Chola Empire.
2. He reasserted the Chola authority over the Chera and Pandya countries.
3. He defeated Jayasimha II, the Western Chalukya king and the river Tungabhadra was recognised as the boundary between the Cholas and Chalukyas.
4. His most famous military enterprise was his expedition to north India. The Chola army crossed the Ganges by defeating a number of rulers on its way. Rajendra defeated Mahipala I of Bengal. To commemorate this successful north-Indian

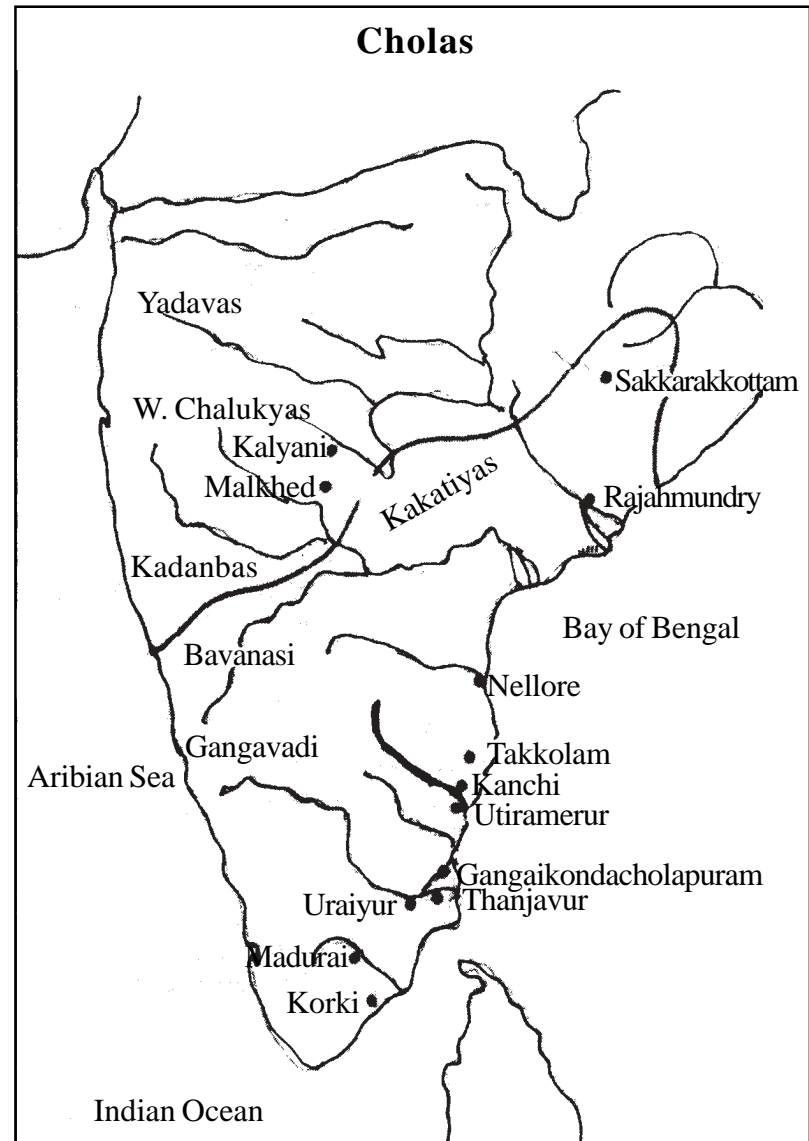
campaign Rajendra founded the city of Gangaikondacholapuram and constructed the famous Rajesvaram temple in that city. He also excavated a large irrigation tank called Cholagangam on the western side of the city.

5. Another famous venture of Rajendra was his naval expedition to Kadaram or Sri Vijaya. It is difficult to pin point the real object of the expedition. Whatever its objects were, the naval expedition was a complete success. A number of places were occupied by Chola forces. But it was only temporary and no permanent annexation of these places was contemplated. He assumed the title Kadaramkondan.

6. Rajendra I had put down all rebellions and kept his empire in tact.

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

After Rajendra I, the greatness of the Chola power was preserved by rulers like Kulottunga I and Kulottunga III. Kulottunga I was the grandson of Rajendra I through his daughter Ammangadevi. He succeeded the Chola throne and thus united the Vengi kingdom with the Chola Empire. During his reign Sri Lanka became



independent. Subsequently, Vengi and the Mysore region were captured by the western Chalukyas. Kulottunga I sent a large embassy of 72 merchants to China and maintained cordial relations with the kingdom of Sri Vijaya. Under Kulottunga III the central authority became weak. The rise of the feudatories like the Kadavarayas and the emergence of the Pandya power as a challenge to Chola supremacy contributed to the ultimate downfall of the Chola Empire. Rajendra III was the last Chola king who was defeated by Jatavarman Sundarapandya II. The Chola country was absorbed into the Pandya Empire.

Chola Administration

Central Government

The Cholas had an excellent system of administration. The emperor or king was at the top of the administration. The extent and resources of the Chola Empire increased the power and prestige of monarchy. The big capital cities like Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram, the large royal courts and extensive grants to the temples reveal the authority of the king. They undertook royal tours to increase the efficiency of the administration. There was elaborate administrative machinery comprising various officials called *perundanam* and *sirudanam*.

Revenue

The land revenue department was well organized. It was called as *puravubarithinaikkalam*. All lands were carefully surveyed and classified for assessment of revenue. The residential portion of the village was called *ur nattam*. These and other lands such as the lands belonging to temples were exempted from tax. Besides land revenue, there were tolls and customs on goods taken from one place to another, various kinds of professional taxes, dues levied on ceremonial occasions like marriages and judicial fines. During

the hard times, there were remission of taxes and Kulottunga I became famous by abolishing tolls and earned the title – *Sungam Tavirtta Cholan*. The main items of government expenditure were the king and his court, army and navy, roads, irrigation tanks and canals.

Military Administration

The Cholas maintained a regular standing army consisting of elephants, cavalry, infantry and navy. About seventy regiments were mentioned in the inscriptions. The royal troops were called *Kaikkolaperumpadai*. Within this there was a personal troop to defend the king known as *Velaikkarar*. Attention was given to the training of the army and military cantonments called *kadagams* existed. The Cholas paid special attention to their navy. The naval achievements of the Tamils reached its climax under the Cholas. They controlled the Malabar and Coromandal coasts. In fact, the Bay of Bengal became a Chola lake for sometime.

Provincial Administration

The Chola Empire was divided into *mandalams* and each *mandalam* into *valanadus* and *nadus*. In each *nadu* there were a number of autonomous villages. The royal princes or officers were in charge of *mandalams*. The *valanadu* was under *periyannattar* and *nadu* under *nattar*. The town was known as *nagaram* and it was under the administration of a council called *nagarattar*.

Village Assemblies

The system of village autonomy with *sabhas* and their committees developed through the ages and reached its culmination during the Chola rule. Two inscriptions belonging to the period of Parantaka I found at Uttiramerur provide details of the formation and functions of village councils. That 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:

- a. Ownership of at least one fourth *veli* of land.
- b. Own residence.
- c. Above thirty years and below seventy years of age.
- d. Knowledge of Vedas.

However, certain norms of disqualification were also mentioned in the inscriptions. They were:

- a. Those who had been members of the committees for the past three years.
- b. Those who had failed to submit accounts as committee members.
- c. Those who had committed sins.
- d. Those who had stolen the property of others.

From the persons duly nominated, one was to be chosen for each ward by *kudavolai* system for a year. The names of eligible persons were written on palm-leaves and put into a pot. A young boy or girl would take out thirty names each for one ward. They were divided into six *variya*ms such as *samvatsaravariyam*, *erivariyam*, *thotta variyam*, *pancha variyam*, *pon variyam* and *puravuvari variyam* to take up six different functions of the village administration. The committee members were called *variya*pperumakkal. They usually met in the temple or under a tree and passed resolutions. The number of committees and ward members varied from village to village.

Socio-economic Life

Caste system was widely prevalent during the Chola period.

Brahmins and Kshatriyas enjoyed special privileges. The inscriptions of the later period of the Chola rule mention about two major divisions among the castes – *Valangai* and *Idangai* castes. However, there was cooperation among various castes and sub-castes in social and religious life. The position of women did not improve. The practice of ‘sati’ was prevalent among the royal families. The *devadasi* system or dancing girls attached to temples emerged during this period.

Both Saivism and Vaishnavism continued to flourish during the Chola period. A number of temples were built with the patronage of Chola kings and queens. The temples remained centres of economic activity during this period. The *mathas* had great influence during this period. Both agriculture and industry flourished. Reclamation of forest lands and the construction and maintenance of irrigation tanks led to agricultural prosperity. The weaving industry, particularly the silk-weaving at Kanchi flourished. The metal works developed owing to great demand of images for temples and utensils. Commerce and trade were brisk with trunk roads or *peruvazhis* and merchant guilds. Gold, silver and copper coins were issued in plenty at various denominations. Commercial contacts between the Chola Empire and China, Sumatra, Java and Arabia were extensively prevalent. Arabian horses were imported in large numbers to strengthen the cavalry.



GOLD COIN OF
RAJARAJA CHOLA

Education and Literature

Education was also given importance. Besides the temples and *mathas* as educational centres, several educational institutions also flourished. The inscription at Ennayiram, Thirumukkudal and Thirubhuvanai provide details of the colleges existed in these places.

Apart from the Vedas and Epics, subjects like mathematics and medicine were taught in these institutions. Endowment of lands was made to run these institutions.

The development of Tamil literature reached its peak during the Chola period. *Sivakasintamani* written by Thiruthakkadevar and Kundalakesi belonged to 10th century. The Ramayana composed by Kamban and the *Periyapuranam* or *Tirutondarpuranam* by Sekkilar are the two master-pieces of this age. Jayankondar's *Kalingattupparani* describes the Kalinga war fought by Kulotunga I. The *Moovarula* written by Ottakuthar depicts the life of three Chola kings. The *Nalavenba* was written by Pugalendi. The works on Tamil grammar like *Kalladam* by Kalladanar, *Yapperungalam* by Amirthasagarar, a Jain, *Nannul* by Pavanandhi and *Virasoliyam* by Buddhmitra were the products of the Chola age.

Art and Architecture

The Dravidian style of art and architecture reached its perfection under the Cholas. They built enormous temples. The chief feature of the Chola temple is the vimana. The early Chola temples were found at



Chola Bronze Nataraja

Narthamalai and Kodumbalur in Pudukottai district and at Srinivasanallur in Tiruchirappalli district. The Big Temple at Tanjore built by Rajaraja I is a master-piece of South Indian art and architecture. It consists of the *vimana*, *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa* and a large pavilion in the front known as the *Nandimandapa*. Another notable contribution made by the Cholas to temple



Pragadeeswara Temple, Tanjore

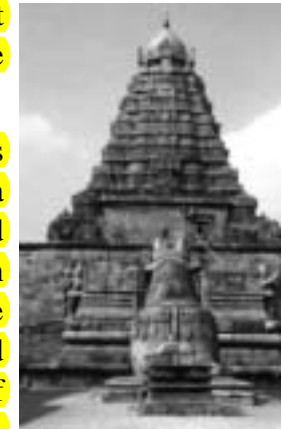


Darasuram Sculptures

examples of later Chola temples.

The Cholas also made rich contributions to the art of sculpture. The walls of the Chola temples such as the Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram temples contain numerous icons of large size with fine execution. The bronzes of the Chola period are world-famous. The bronze statues of Nataraja or dancing Siva are master pieces. The Chola paintings were found on the walls of Narthamalai and Tanjore temples.

architecture is the Siva temple at Gangaikondacholapuram built by Rajendra I. The Airavathesvara temple at Darasuram in Tanjore District and the Kampaharesvara temple at Tribhuvanam are



Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple

Learning Outcome

After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain

1. The rise of the Imperial Cholas.
2. The military accomplishments of Rajaraja I and his personality.
3. Rajendra I and his military conquests.
4. Village administration of the Cholas and its significance.
5. Cultural achievements of the Imperial Cholas.