

Chola Dynasty

The Cholas' supremacy began in the 9th century when they conquered the Pallavas to come into power. This rule extended for over five long centuries until the 13th century.

- In the early periods of the Chola rule, the beginning of the Sangam literature was seen. Kintamani was one of the well-known rulers of this era.
- The medieval period was the era of outright power and growth for the Cholas. This was the time of kings like Aditya I and Parantaka I.
- From that point, Rajaraj Chola and Rajendra Chola extended the kingdom into the Tamil region.
- Later, Kulothunga Chola acquired Kalinga to establish a solid rule. This glory lasted until the appearance of the Pandyas in the early 13th century.

Chola Dynasty Rulers

Below are some of the most famous rulers of the Chola Empire:

- **Vijayalaya:** Vijayalaya founded the Chola Empire. He acquired the Tanjore kingdom in the 8th century and headed the rise of the mighty Chola dynasty by conquering the Pallavas. Tanjore was made the first capital of the renowned Chola Empire.
- **Aditya I:** Aditya, I was the successor of Vijayalaya to become the empire's ruler. He conquered king Aparajita, and his empire gained enormous power under his reign. He defeated the Pandya Kings and the Vadumbas and formed control over the Pallavas' influence in the region.
- **Rajendra Chola:** Rajendra Chola was the successor of the mighty Rajaraja Chola. He was the one who first ventured to the banks of the Ganges. Gangaikondacholapuram was declared his empire capital, where he was honoured with the 'Gangaikonda.' This era is mentioned as the Golden Age of the Cholas. After his rule, the kingdom saw an extensive downfall.

Culture and Temples During the Chola Empire

The temples were the primary venues for all religious and social gatherings. The area around this location was transformed into a community school where children were educated about the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Vedas.

- The societal structure of the period was split between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. Many Goddesses and Gods were revered, with Shiva serving as the faithful's main source of fortitude.
- The primary deity at Sri Venkateshwara Temple has significant connections to the significance of the Chola Dynasty. The Srirangam temple is undoubtedly the pinnacle of this time. After being immersed in water for many years, it was later returned to its former splendour.
- Along the Kaveri River's banks, numerous Shiva temples have been constructed. Among all the temples in India at the time, the Thanjavur temple is still the tallest and largest.
- Even now, the Tanjore Brihadeeswara temple is adorned with murals in natural colours that are a visual pleasure. Many of these locations have been designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. These include the Airavatesvara, Gangaikondacholisvaram, and Brihadisvara temples.
- During the Chola Empire, the arts and sculpture reached their highest levels ever. Bronze statues of goddesses and gods like Lakshmi, Vishnu, and Shiva are shining reminders of this time.
- Another significant high point of this time was literature. Religious literature began to take shape during this time, and Jain and Buddhist writings received recognition. Even today, literary historians adore the well-known Nalayira Divya Prabandham, a collection of 4000 Tamil poetry from this era.

As a result, the Chola Dynasty left a significant legacy. Their rule stands for grand buildings, superb artwork, and a golden age of literature.

Chola Administration

The king presided over the government and is referred to in Chola inscriptions as Ko, Perumal Adigal (the great one), and Ko-Konmai Kondan (king of kings). The Chola inscriptions portray the monarch as a great warrior, conqueror, great patron of the arts, slayer of ills, kind and protective with a charming demeanour. To improve the effectiveness of the government, the monarch performed royal travels.

- The administrative structure was greater than the Cheras, Pandyas, and Pallavas. However, it experienced a downturn after Kulottunga I's passing, and local chieftains' influence grew.
- Eight Mandalams (provinces) made up the Rashtriyam/Rajyam (imperial), and every Mandalam used to have a governor/viceroy (generally a prince). Under Nattar, these provinces were further split into Valanadus or Kottams, and within each Valanadus were Nadus (districts). The Nadus was a collection of numerous independent villages. The guilds and Shrenis were also involved in the management.
- The Chola kingdom had two different sorts of villages at the local level. People from many castes lived in one form of a village, and the organisation in charge of this sort of village was known as the "ur." The second sort of village was an "agrahara" type, where most of the land was free of rent and was occupied by Brahmins.
- The 'Sabha' or 'Mahasabha', a meeting of the adult men in brahmana villages, served as the assembly for this form of agrahara village. These communities had a great deal of independence. Details on how these committees were chosen are provided in the Uttarameruru inscription that Prantaka Chola released.
- The Cholas conducted thorough land surveys and revenue settlements for tax assessment reasons. Rajaraja I, Kulotunga I, and Kulotunga III designated individuals to conduct a land survey to classify and value the property for taxation purposes. The land revenue division was referred to as puravuvarti-tinaikkalam.
- Several land measurement units were utilised, including kuli, ma, veli, Patti, and padagam. The tax rates were set depending on the soil's fertility and the owner's status. In addition to land taxes, additional sources of income included tolls and customs on commodities moved between locations, several types of professional taxes, fees for ceremonial events like weddings, and judicial fines.
- The gathering of the merchants, known as Nagaram, was tailored to various trades and skilled groups. For instance, the Satsuma Parishatta Nagaram and Saliya Nagaram were connected to the textile industry, as were the Shankarappadi Nagaram, providers of ghee and oil. The Ayyavole (the five hundred) were strong and significant guilds in the Aihole, Karnataka, and Manigramam. These guilds grew in strength and then gained independence.
- The Cholas kept a sizable force of infantry, cavalry, and elephants, known as the "three limbs of the army." All of the king's bodyguards allegedly set themselves on fire in the funeral pyre of the dead king, according to the Venetian explorer Marco Polo.

Religion and Society During the Chola Dynasty

The Chola kings were devout Saivas. For the Cholas, Shiva was the most important deity, and he had two manifestations. Lingodhbhava, the most recognisable manifestation of Siva, was the Nataraja idol's human form. Saiva Siddhanta, a highly developed philosophical philosophy, was established at this time.

Sanskritization, or the lower-class imitation of upper-class heritage, dates back to the Chola era. The Chola kingdom was characterised by a pervasive caste system, divided into "Idangai" and "Vadangai" in the Chola Dynasty.

Between the Shaivites and the Vaishnavites, violent conflicts broke out. Sati practice evolved into a religious practice, and the "Devadasi" system, a new social ill, became prevalent.

Chola Dynasty: Latest News

Six bronze idols from the Chola Dynasty that were looted from the Nareeswara Sivan temple in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s and are now on display in several museums in the United States have been located thanks to efforts by the Tamil Nadu Idol Wing CID.

- With the pictures held by the Indo-French Institute, Pondicherry, which had chronicled nine bronze sculptures in 1956, the idols were recently successfully traced to the US. Seven of them were taken fifty years ago.
- Images of ancient Nataraja, Panchaloha idols of Tripuranthakam, Thirupurasundari, Dakshinamurthy, Saint Sundarar, and his wife Paravai Natchiyaar, long with Veenadhara, were made available by the institute.