



# 1,000 Years of Rajendra Chola I's Maritime Expedition

**For Prelims:** Thiruvallangadu Inscription, Battle of Kandalur Salai, Cholas, [Pandyas](#), Cheras, [Chalukyas](#), Nagapattinam, [Local Self-Government](#), [Brihadeshwara Temple](#), [Dravidian Temple Architecture](#), [UNESCO](#), Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Airavateshvara Temple, Dakshina Meru, [Mural Paintings](#), [Bharatanatyam](#), [Nataraja Statue](#)

**For Mains:** Contribution of Chola dynasty in Indian history, Art & Architecture of Chola dynasty.

[Source: IE](#)

## Why in News?

The **Prime Minister** visited **Gangaikonda Cholapuram** in **Ariyalur district, Tamil Nadu**, during the **Aadi Thiruvathirai festival**, and the **Brihadisvara Temple** ([UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)).

- He highlighted the **Chola Empire's democratic traditions**, and released a **commemorative coin** marking **1000 years of Rajendra Chola I's Gangetic expedition**.
  - The **Aadi Thiruvathirai Festival** commemorated 1,000 years of Rajendra Chola I's legendary maritime expedition to Southeast Asia and also marked the rich **Tamil Shaiva Bhakti tradition**.

## What are the Key Facts About Rajendra Chola I?

- **About: Rajendra Chola I (1014 to 1044 AD)**, son of Rajaraja Chola I, was one of the greatest rulers of the **Chola Empire**.
  - He was the **first Indian king to lead overseas military expeditions**, extending Chola influence across **South and Southeast Asia**.
- **Titles and Legacy:** He assumed titles like **Gangaikonda Cholan** (after defeating the Palas in Bengal) and **Kadaram Kondan** (after naval victories in the Srivijaya Empire), **Pandita Cholan**, and **Mudikondan**.
  - Founded a new capital, **Gangaikondacholapuram**, to commemorate his northern conquests.
  - Built **Brihadisvara Temple (Gangaikondacholeeswaram)** and **Chola Gangam Lake (Ponneri)** in present-day **Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu**.
- **Military and Naval Prowess:** He reasserted control over **Chera** and **Pandya** regions; defeated **Jayasimha II** of Western Chalukyas, **Tungabhadra River** became the northern frontier.
  - His conquests included **Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Kedah, Tambralinga, and Burma**, establishing one of India's earliest **blue-water navies**.
- **Trade, Culture, & Administration:** Under his rule, **Tamil merchant guilds** like *Manigramam* and *Ayyavole* thrived, fostering **trade and cultural exchange** with China and Southeast Asia.
  - Promoted **Shaivism**, patronized **Chidambaram's Nataraja Temple**, yet maintained religious **tolerance** toward **Vaishnavism** and **Buddhism**.

## Chola Dynasty

- One of the three major **Tamil dynasties**, alongside **Cheras and Pandyas**, and among the longest-ruling powers in South India.
- Founded by **Vijayalaya Chola** in the 9th century AD after defeating the Pallavas.
- The empire expanded across **South India, Sri Lanka, and parts of Southeast Asia**.
- It reached its peak under **Rajaraja Chola I and Rajendra Chola I**, known for military conquests and administrative excellence.
- Declined with the resurgence of the Pandyas in the 13th century.
- **Key Rulers:**
  - **Vijayalaya Chola:** Founder, captured Tanjore.
  - **Aditya Chola I:** Defeated Pallavas, annexed Tondaimandalam.
  - **Parantaka Chola I:** Won battles, forged alliances, but suffered defeat at Takkolam.
  - **Rajaraja Chola I:** Built Brihadeeswara Temple, expanded empire.
  - **Rajendra Chola I:** Continued Rajaraja's legacy, including naval conquests.
  - **Kulothunga Chola I:** Strengthened administration, promoted trade.
  - **Rajaraja Chola II:** Marked the decline of the Chola Empire.

### Read More:

- [Chola Dynasty](#)
- [Raja Raja I and Chola Administration](#)





## What are the Key Features of Chola Administration & Architecture?

### Chola Administration

- **Centralised Monarchy with Decentralised Governance:** The **Chola Empire** maintained a **centralised monarchy, headed by king** and supported by a structured **ministerial council**, with high officials called **Peruntaram** and lower ones as **Siruntaram**.
  - Capitals like **Tanjore** and **Gangaikondacholapuram** symbolised imperial power, and **royal tours** helped improve governance.
- **Provincial and Local Administration:** The empire was divided into **Mandalams (provinces), Valanadus, Nadus** and **Urs (villages)**.
  - Towns or **Nagarams** were run by merchant guilds (**Nagarattar**), while **Nattar** governed Nadus and **Periyannattar** managed Valanadus. **Local self-governance** was strong, especially at the village level.
- **Village Self-Governance & Early Democratic Practices:** Village assemblies- **Sabhas** (Brahmin

villages) and **Urs** (non-Brahmin villages) had real power over revenue, justice, irrigation, and temples.

- A unique **Kudavolai system (palm-leaf ballot)**, where the names of eligible candidates were placed in a pot and drawn by a child in public ensured **transparent village elections**.
- **Eligibility to contest** included **owning tax-paying land ( $\geq \frac{1}{4}$  veli)**, being aged **30-70**, local residency, and knowledge of **Vedas or administration**.
- **Disqualifications** included **alcoholism, crime, unpaid debts, kinship with officials, or prior misconduct**.
  - **Accountability** was ensured through **annual audits**.
- However, the system excluded **women, landless labourers, and lower castes**, reflecting its **hierarchical and non-inclusive** nature.
- **Revenue Administration:** The **revenue system** was managed by a department called **Puravubarithinaikkalam**, with **land surveys and classification**.
  - **Temple lands** and **Ur Nattam** (residential zones) were tax-free. The **main source of revenue** included **land revenue (1/6th of produce)**, paid in cash or kind.
  - Other taxes included tolls, **customs, profession tax, marriage dues, salt pans**, etc. **Kulottunga I** abolished tolls and earned the title "**Sungam Tavirtta Cholan**".
  - Expenditure included **royal court, army, irrigation, roads, canals**.
- **Military Administration:** Cholas maintained a strong **4-fold army: Infantry, Cavalry, Elephants, Navy** and key forces included **Kaikkolaperumpadai** (royal army) and **Velaikkarar** (bodyguards).
  - Training was held at **Kadagams** (cantonments). The **navy** was powerful, securing **Bay of Bengal dominance** and influence in **Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia**.
- **Trade and Economic Administration:** Internal trade was organized via powerful merchant guilds like **Manigramam, Ayyavole, and Nanadesis**.
  - **Urban merchant bodies (Nagarams)** played a role in civic and economic governance.
  - Chola ports like **Puhar** supported flourishing **maritime trade with West Asia, China, and Southeast Asia**.
  - **Exports** included textiles, spices, gems and **imports** included luxury items, horses. **Urban guilds (Nagarams)** aided civic governance.

## Chola Art and Architecture:

- The **Dravidian style** of temple architecture reached its **peak under the Cholas**.
  - The defining feature is the **Vimana** (tower over the sanctum). Temples typically included components like **vimana, ardhmandapa, mahamandapa, and Nandimandapa** (pavilion for Nandi).
- Early examples include temples at **Narthamalai, Kodumbalur, and Srinivasanallur**. Major temples like the **Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur** (by Rajaraja I), **Gangaikondacholapuram** (by Rajendra I), **Airavatesvara Temple (Darasuram)**, and **Kampaharesvara Temple (Tribhuvanam)** show their architectural brilliance.
- Chola temples like **Tanjore** and **Gangaikondacholapuram** are adorned with **large, finely executed sculptures**.
  - The **Chola bronze sculptures**, especially the image of **Nataraja (dancing Shiva)**, are globally renowned for their **aesthetic beauty, grace, and craftsmanship**.
- **Chola paintings** were found on temple walls at **Narthamalai** and **Tanjore**, reflecting both religious and secular themes.

## Brihadeeswarar Temple (Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple) Ariyalur

- Built by **Rajendra Chola I (1014 to 1044 AD)** to commemorate his **Gangetic expedition**, this temple marked the **shift of Chola capital** from Thanjavur to **Gangaikonda Cholapuram**, which remained the **imperial seat until 1279 AD**.
- Dedicated to **Lord Shiva**, the temple (Gangaikondacholisvarar) reflects **refined Dravidian architecture**, surpassing even the earlier **Brihadisvara Temple** built by his **father Rajaraja Chola I**, symbolising both **military glory and religious devotion**.
- The annual **Aadi Thiruvathirai festival** celebrates Rajendra's **birth star (Thiruvadhirai)** with **Therukoothu performances** and ceremonial offerings, reflecting the

dynasty's **cultural legacy**.

- Supported by inscriptions from **1027 & 1068 AD** and the **Esalam copper plates (1036 AD)**, the temple received sustained royal patronage under Chola rulers like **Virarajendra**.
- It was declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004**, along with the **Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram**. **Thanjavur temple** was earlier included in **1987**, all together forming the **Great Living Chola Temples**.



**Drishti Mains Question:**

Examine the architectural contributions of the Chola dynasty, particularly the Dravidian temple style. How did these architectural achievements reflect the empire's cultural and religious values?

**UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

**Prelims**

**Q. The Nagara, the Dravida and the Vesara are the (2012)**

- (a) three main racial groups of the Indian subcontinent
- (b) three main linguistic divisions into which the languages of India can be classified

(c) three main styles of Indian temple architecture

(d) three main musical Gharanas prevalent in India

**Ans: (c)**

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**Mains**

**Q: (a)** Discuss the Tandava dance as recorded in the early Indian inscriptions.

**(b)** Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss. (2013)

**Q.** Indian philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss. (2020)

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