



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?

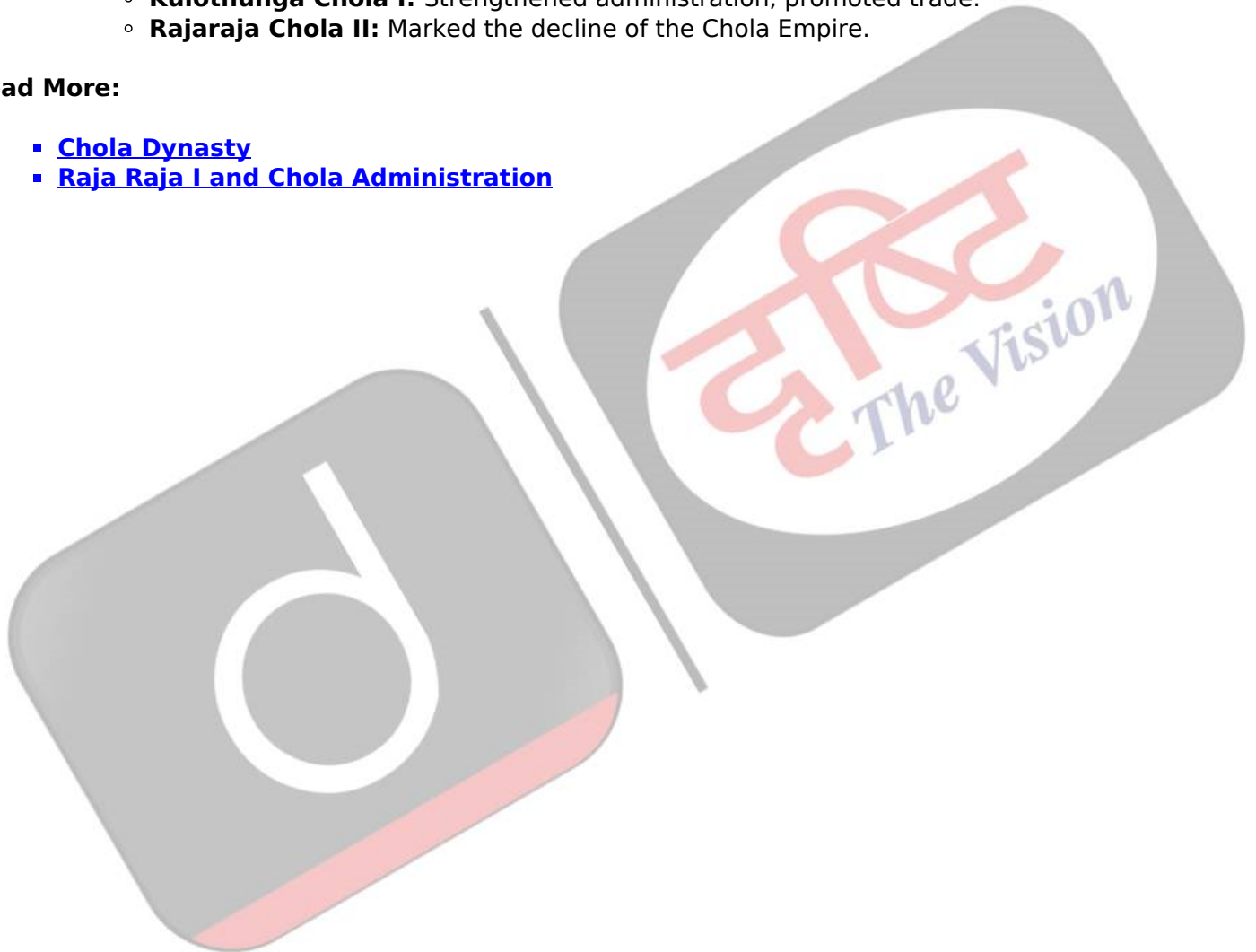
- **About: Rajendra Chola I (1014 to 1044 AD)**, son of Rajaraja Chola I, was one of the greatest rulers of the **Chola Empire**.
 - He was the **first Indian king to lead overseas military expeditions**, extending Chola influence across **South and Southeast Asia**.
- **Titles and Legacy:** He assumed 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 **Periyanattar** 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 **Puravuvarithinaikkalam**, 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)

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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