

The southern part of the Indian peninsula situated south of the Krishna river was inhabited by the Dravidians. They had their own language and culture. This region was home to three powerful kingdoms-the Cheras, the Pandyas and the Cholas.

The most powerful of the three were the Cholas. They developed a powerful navy to conquer Sri Lanka and the Maldive Islands.

SOURCES

The important sources of information about the Cholas are the following:

1. Inscriptions: Rajaraja I started inscriptions of his achievements in the form of Copper-plate grants, stone inscriptions and inscriptions made on the walls and pillars of temples.

The Copper-plate grants known as Anbil and Karandi as well as the Kanyakumari stone inscription give a long list of rulers. These plates are written in Sanskrit and Tamil.

The inscriptions provide the following information about the Cholas.

- (i) They tell us about the Chola administration.
- (ii) They record gifts and endowments to temples and brahmanas. Copper-plate inscriptions are the records of grants of villages, plots of land or other privileges to individuals or institutions by the Cholas.
- (iii) They inform us about the construction of a temple or the setting up of a new image of the deity.
- (iv) Some inscriptions have royal orders on taxation.

2. The Brihadeshwara temple: The gateway of the temple was called 'gopuram'. The main shrine was known as the 'garbhagriha'. These images were made either of stone or bronze. The 'mandapa' or the audience hall, was a place where people gathered for prayers. The



chief features of Chola temples are their massive vimanas or towers and spacious courtyards. The best example of Chola temple is the **Brihadeshwara**, also known as **Rajarajeshwara temple**, dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is located at Thanjavur and was built by the Chola king, Rajaraja I. It is one of the best specimens of Dravidian style of architecture

The main structure of the temple has a great vimana or tower which rises to a height of 66 metres. It is crowned by a massive dome consisting of a single block of stone, 7.6 metres high and weighing about 80 tons.

The shrine houses a gigantic Shiva Lingam, cut in a monolithic rock about 8.87 metres high.



POLITICAL HISTORY

Founder of Chola dynasty **Vijayalaya** in Tamil land, with Thanjavur as his capital.

Rajaraja I: Rajaraja I was a brilliant general. He attacked the kingdoms of the Pandyas and the Cheras as well as parts of Mysore, coasts of Kerala, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Maldive Islands. Arab merchants brought wealth to India. He built the Rajarajeshwara temple of Lord Shiva at Thanjavur.



Rajendra Chola: Rajendra succeeded his father, Rajaraja I. He captured Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Odisha up to the Ganga river. The Chola army

defeated Mahipala, king of Bengal. To celebrate this victory he adopted the title of **Gangaikonda** and built a new capital called Gangaikonda-Cholapuram.

THE CHOLA ADMINISTRATION

The Chola system of administration was highly organised and efficient. The king was the pivot of administration and all the authority rested in his hands.

Central Government: The king was the most important person who had Council of Ministers to advise him.

Provincial Government: The Chola empire was divided into mandalams or provinces. These were further divided into valanadu and nadu.

Local Self Government: Villages had three types of village assemblies, namely, the ur, the sabha and the nagaram. **The ur** was assembly of the villages where the land was held by all classes of people. **The sabha** was an exclusively Brahmin assembly of the villages. **The nagaram** was an assembly of merchants and belonged to localities where traders and merchants were in a dominant position.

The temple in the Chola kingdom was the centre of social activity. It was not only a place of worship, but was also a place where people gathered together. The land donated to temples were known as Devadaya or Devadana.

The temples were also the biggest employers after the State, providing work and means of livelihood to a large number of people. The temples used to take care of the welfare of its workers by providing food, clothing and housing facilities and by arranging proper education and establishing hospitals. The temple was also a centre for education. The priests of the temple were the local teachers as there were no separate schools. Students were taught in Sanskrit and Tamil.

The Revenue: Taxes on land and the produce of the land, and tax on trade. It was used on public works.

The Chola Art: They built temples, canals, roads, cities and palaces. Most of the Chola temples were built in the Dravidian style. The art of making stone and metal images had made rapid progress under the Chola rulers.

The bronze image of Lord Shiva as 'Nataraja'-Lord of Dance', is an excellent work of art. The image of Nataraja has been described as the "cultural epitome" of the Chola period.



SIR TARUN RUPA