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Raja Raja Chola



Emperor Raja Raja Chola I

Rajaraja Chola I (born as Arulmozhi Varman) is one of the greatest emperors of the Tamil Chola Empire and India, who ruled between 985 and 1014 CE. He established the Chola empire by conquering the kingdoms of southern India expanding the Chola Empire as far as Sri Lanka in the south, and Kalinga (Orissa) in the northeast. He fought many battles with the Chalukyas in the north and the Pandyas in the south. By conquering Vengi, Rajaraja laid the foundations for the Later Chola dynasty. He invaded Sri Lanka and started a century-long Chola occupation of the island. Rajaraja Chola I holds the distinction of being one of the six Indian Kings who never lost out on the battlefield to the enemies. He streamlined the administrative system with the division of the country into various districts and by standardizing revenue collection through systematic land surveys. He built the magnificent Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur and through it enabled wealth distribution amongst his subjects.

Rajaraja was born as the third child of Parantaka Sundara Chola and Vanavan Maha Devi. After a long apprenticeship of an heir apparent, he ascended the throne after the death of Uttama Chola. During the lifetime of his father Sundara Chola, Arulmozhi had carved a name for himself by his exploits in the battles against the Sinhala and Pandyan armies. Sundara Chola's eldest son and heir apparent Aditya II was assassinated under unclear circumstances. Uttama, as the only child of Gandar Aditya, wanted the Chola throne as he felt it was his birthright. After the death of Aditya II, Uttama forced Sundara Chola to declare him as their apparent ahead of Arulmozhi.

The Thiruvallangadu copper-plate inscriptions say:

"...Though his subjects..entreated Arulmozhi Varman, he..did not desire the kingdom for himself even inwardly ".

This was to say that Raja Raja was very much legally elected through the kind of democratic process followed by cholas as seen in their uttiramalur inscription. The Thiruvallangadu inscription again states:

"Having noticed by the marks (on his body) that Arulmozhi was the very Vishnu, the protector of the three worlds, descended on earth, [Uttama] installed him in the position of yuvaraja (heir apparent) and himself bore the burden of ruling the earth..."

Military Conquests

The southern kingdoms of Pandyas, Cheras and the Sinhala were often allied against the Cholas. It was the case when Rajaraja came to the throne. Rajaraja's initial campaigns were against the combined Pandya and Chera armies. There is no evidence of any military campaign undertaken by Rajaraja until the eighth year of his reign. During this period he was engaged in organising and augmenting his army and in preparing for military expeditions. The first military achievement of Rajaraja's reign was the campaign in Kerala c. 994 CE. Rajaraja's early inscriptions use the descriptive 'Kandalur salai kalamarutta'. In this campaign Rajaraja is said to have destroyed a fleet in the port of Kandalur, which appears to have been situated in the dominions of the Chera King Bhaskara Ravi Varman Thiruvadi (c. 978-1036 CE). Inscriptions found around Thanjavur show that frequent references are made to the conquest of the Chera king and the Pandyas in Malai-nadu (the west coast of South India). Kandalur-Salai, which later inscriptions claim to have belonged to the Chera king, was probably held by the Pandyas when it was conquered by Rajaraja.

In the war against the Pandyas, Rajaraja seized the Pandya king Amarabhujanga and the Chola general captured the port of Virinam. To commemorate these conquests Rajaraja assumed the title Mummudi-Chola, (the Chola king who wears three crowns - the Chera, Chola and Pandya). Whereas the title Raja Raja was conferred on him by serving members of chidambaram temple of ancient who had also the duty of

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conducting the swearing in ceremony of chola and pallava princes.

To eliminate the remaining actor in the triumvirate, Rajaraja invaded Sri Lanka in 993 CE. The copper-plate inscription mentions that Rajaraja's powerful army crossed the ocean by ships and burnt up the kingdom of Lanka. Mahinda V was the king of Sinhala. In 991 CE, Mahinda's army mutinied with help from mercenaries from Kerala. Mahinda had to seek refuge in the southern region of Rohana. Rajaraja utilised this opportunity and invaded the island. Chola armies occupied the northern half of Lanka and named the dominion 'Mummudi Chola Mandalam'. Anuradhapura, the 1400-year-old capital of Sinhala kings was destroyed. The destruction was so extensive the city was abandoned. Cholas made the city of Polonnaruwa as their capital and renamed it Jananathamangalam. The choice of this city demonstrates the desire of Rajaraja to conquer the entire island. Rajaraja also built a Temple for Siva in Polonnaruwa.

Rajaraja also expanded his conquests in the north and northwest. The regions of Gangapadi (Gangawadi), Nolambapadi (Nolambawadi), Tadigaipadi came into Chola possession during Rajaraja. Before his 14th year c. 998-999 CE, Rajaraja conquered Gangapadi (Gangawadi) and Nurambapadi (Nolambawadi), which formed part of the present Karnataka State. This conquest was facilitated by the fact the Cholas never lost their hold of the Ganga country from the efforts of Sundara Chola. Nolambas who were the feudatories of Ganga could have turned against their overlords and aided the Cholas to conquer the Gangas, who were the chief bulwark against the Chola armies in the northwest.

One of the last conquests of Rajaraja was the naval conquest of the 'old islands of the sea numbering 12,000', the Maldives. Indonesia contains around 13,000 islands and contains islands like Bali which in Tamil phonetically resembles 'Palam (Balam) thivu panneerayram'. Many of the islands up to Philippines have Tamil names like Aru, Natuna=middle, Banda=Pandyas, Pahlawan=Pallavan, Zulu=Chola, Ceram=Kerala names.

Rajaraja's great reign is commemorated by the magnificent Siva temple in Thanjavur, called **Rajarajeswaram** - the finest monument of this period of South Indian history. The temple is remarkable both for its massive proportions and for its simplicity of design. It is now recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, forming part of the Great Living Chola Temples site. The construction of the temple is said to have been completed on the 275th day of the 25th year of his reign. After its commemoration the great temple and the capital had close business relations with the rest of the country and acted as a centre of both religious and economic activity.



The magnificent Brihadeeswara Temple

Administration

From the 23rd to the 29th year of Rajaraja's rule his dominions enjoyed peace and the king apparently devoted his energies to the task of internal administration. The building of the Rajarajeswara temple in Thanjavur and the various endowments and gifts to it must have occupied a prominent place in the king's mind during these years. Rajaraja carried out a revenue and settlement during the final years of his reign. Inscriptions found in the Thanjavur temple bear testimony to the accuracy of this operation. Land as small in extent as 1/52,428,800,000 of a 'veli' (a land measure) was measured and assessed to revenue. The revenue survey enabled for the confiscation of lands of the defaulting landlords.

Rajaraja also perfected the administrative organization by creating a strong and centralised machinery and by appointing local government authorities. He installed a system of audit and control by which the village assemblies and other public bodies were held to account while not curtailing their autonomy.

Rajaraja created a powerful standing army and a considerable navy which achieved even greater success under his son Rajendra. The prominence given to the army from the conquest of the Pandyas down to the last year of the king's reign is significant, and shows the spirit with which he treated his soldiers. A number of regiments are mentioned in the Tanjore inscriptions and it is evident that Rajaraja gave his army its due share in the glory derived from his extensive conquests.

The idea of Rajaraja to add a short account of his military achievements at the beginning of every one of his inscriptions was entirely his own. His action in this respect is all the more laudable because his successors evidently followed his example and have left us more or less complete records of their conquests. But for the historical introductions, which are often found at the beginning of the Tamil inscriptions of Chola, kings the lithic records of the Tamil country would be of very little value, and consequently even the little advance that has been made in elucidating the history of Southern India would have been well nigh impossible.

Early Tamil records are dated not in the Saka or any other well-known era but in the regnal year of the king to whose time the grants belong, and palaeography is not always a very safe guide in South-Indian history.

With the help of the names of contemporary kings of other dynasties mentioned in the historical introductions of the Tamil inscriptions, it has been possible to fix the approximate dates of most of the Chola kings. Consequently, the service, which Rajaraja has rendered to epigraphists in introducing a brief account of his military achievements at the beginning of his stone inscriptions, cannot be overestimated.

The historical side of Rajaraja's intellectual nature is further manifested in the order, which he issued to have all the grants made to the Thanjavur temple engraved on stone. Rajaraja not only was particular about recording his achievements, but also was equally diligent in preserving the records of his predecessors. For instance, an inscription of his reign found at Tirumalavadi near Thruchi records an order of the king to the effect that the central shrine of the Vaidyanatha temple at the place should be rebuilt and that, before pulling down the walls, the inscriptions engraved on them should be copied in a book. The records were subsequently re-engraved on the walls from the book after the rebuilding was finished.

Religious Policy

An ardent follower of Saivism (one of the 4 major streams of Hinduism), Rajaraja was nevertheless tolerant towards other faiths and creeds. He also had several temples for Vishnu constructed. He also encouraged the construction of the Buddhist Chudamani Vihara at the request of the Srivijaya king Sri Maravijayatungavarman. Rajaraja dedicated the proceeds of the revenue from the village of Anaimangalam towards the upkeep of this Vihara.



**Old
Edition**

- » October 2009
- » February 2010
- » December 2009
- » March 2010
- » January 2010