

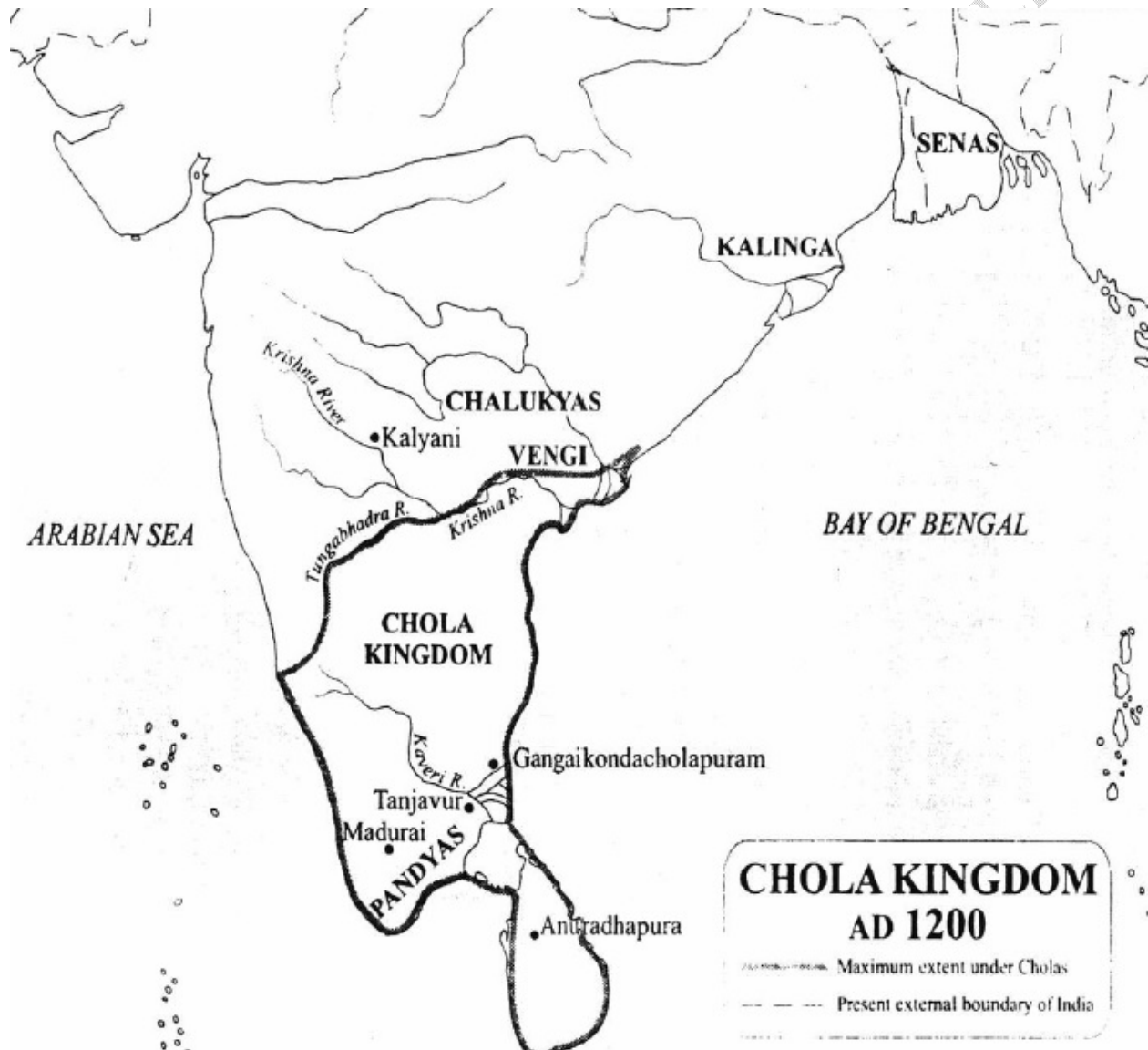
Topic

RISE OF THE CHOLAS

By

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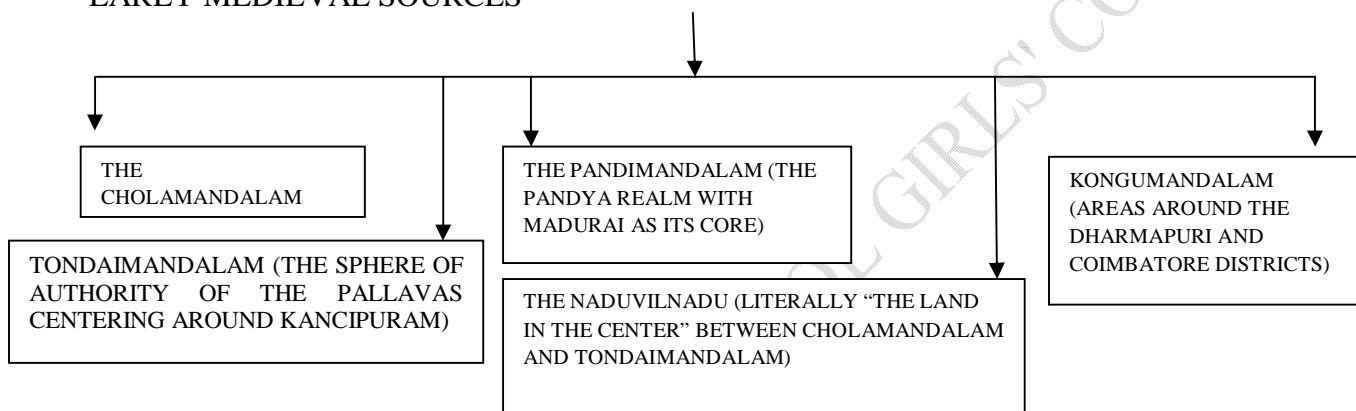
E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls' College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay

The Chola empire which arose in the ninth century. They developed a powerful navy which enabled them to conquer Sri Lanka and the Maldives too. Its impact was felt even by the countries of Southeast Asia. The rise of Chola empire actually changed the political scenario of south India.

During 400 years of its rule, Chola power extended over a large area of south India comprising the whole of the modern state of Tamil Nadu and contiguous areas of southern Karnataka and southern Andhra. Emerging from their heartland in the locality of Uraiyur along the banks of the river Kaveri in the mid 9th century, they soon controlled the entire Tamil-speaking area.

FIVE MAJOR REGIONS THAT COMPRISED THE TAMIL COUNTRY ACCORDING TO EARLY MEDIEVAL SOURCES



Between the late 10th and late 11th centuries, the Chola Empire extended over the entire Andhra region, Mysore, and northern-central part of the island of Sri Lanka. Other islands in the Indian Ocean such as the Lakshadweep and the Maldives were also brought under its control. During the time of **Rajendra Chola (1012–1044)**, its power extended to the Malay Peninsula and the eastern archipelago. The conquests of this ruler in particular suggest that he was victorious over the entire region, from Andhra to Orissa, parts of Madhya Pradesh, and Bengal, which earned him the title of Gangaikondan or the “conqueror of the river Ganga”.

The founder of the Chola empire was Vijayalaya. He was at first a feudatory of the Pallavas. He captured Tanjore in AD 850. Within ninth century, the Cholas had defeated both the Pallavas of Kanchi (Tondaimandalam) and weakened the Pandyas. In this way the Cholas swallowed the entire southern Tamil country. But the Cholas were hard put to defend their position against the Rashtrakutas.

The greatest Chola rulers were **Rajaraja (985–1014) and his son Rajendra I (1014–1044)**. Rajaraja destroyed the **Chera navy at Trivandrum**, and attacked Quilon. He then conquered Madurai and captured the Pandyan king. He also invaded Sri Lanka and annexed its northern part to his empire. These moves were partially motivated by his desire to bring the trade with the Southeast Asian countries under his control. The Coromandel coast and Malabar were the centres for India’s trade with the countries of Southeast Asia. One of his naval exploits was the conquest of the Maldives. Rajaraja, annexed the northwestern parts of the Ganga kingdom in

Karnataka, and overran Vengi. Rajendra had been appointed heir apparent in his father's lifetime, and had considerable experience in administration and warfare before his accession to the throne. **He carried forward the annexationist policy of Rajaraja by completely overrunning the Pandya and Chera countries and including them in his empire.** The conquest of Sri Lanka was also completed, with the crown and royal insignia of the king and the queen of Sri Lanka being captured in a battle. Sri Lanka was not able to free herself from the Chola control for another 50 years.

Rajaraja and Rajendra I marked their victories by erecting a number of Siva and Vishnu temples at various places. The most famous of these was the Brihadishwara temple at Tanjore which was completed in 1010. The Chola rulers adopted the practice of having inscriptions written on the walls of these temples. It helps us to understand the history of Cholas clearly. One of the most remarkable exploits in the reign of Rajendra I was the march across Kalinga to



Bengal in which the Chola armies crossed the river Ganga, and defeated two local kings. This expedition, which was led by a Chola general, took place in 1022 AD and followed in reverse the same route which the great conqueror Samudragupta had followed.

To commemorate this occasion, Rajendra I assumed the title of Gangaikondachola ('the Chola who conquered the Ganga'). He built a new capital near the mouth of the Kaveri river and called it **Gangaikondacholapuram** ('the city of the Chola who conquered the Ganga').

Chola emperors were interested to conquer economically important trade centres outside the Indian subcontinent. Here mention may be made of Rajendra I. During his time a naval expedition was organized against the Sri Vijaya empire. The Sri Vijaya empire, (revived in the 10th century) extended over the Malay peninsula, Sumatra, Java and the neighbouring islands, and controlled the overseas trade route to China. The rulers of the Sailendra dynasty of the Sri Vijaya kingdom were Buddhists and had cordial relations with the Cholas. The Sailendra ruler had built a Buddhist monastery at Nagapatnam and, at his instance, Rajendra I had

endowed a village for its upkeep. The cause of the break between the two apparently was the Chola eagerness to remove obstacles to Indian traders, and to expand trade with China. The expeditions led to the conquest of Kadaram or Kedah and a number of other places in the Malay peninsula and Sumatra. The Chola navy was the strongest in the area, and for some time the Bay of Bengal was converted into a 'Chola lake'. The Chola rulers also sent a number of embassies to China. These were partly diplomatic and partly commercial. Chola embassies reached China in 1016 and 1033. A Chola embassy of 70 merchants reached China in 1077 and, according to a Chinese account, received '81,800 strings of copper-cash', that is, more than four lakhs of rupees in return for the articles of 'tribute' comprising 'glass-ware, camphor, brocades, rhinoceros horns, ivory, etc.' Tribute was the word used by the Chinese for all articles brought for trade.

The Chola rulers fought constantly with the Chalukyas who had succeeded the Rashtrakutas. These are called the later Chalukyas and their capital was at Kalyani. The Cholas and the later Chalukyas clashed for the overlordship of Vengi (Rayalaseema), the Tungabhadra doab, and the Ganga ruled country in northwest Karnataka. Neither side was able to gain a decisive victory in this contest and ultimately it exhausted both the kingdoms. It also appears that the wars were becoming harsher during this time. The Chola rulers sacked and plundered Chalukyan cities including Kalyani, and massacred the people, including Brahmans and children. They adopted a similar policy in the Pandya country, settling military colonies to overawe the population. They destroyed Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of the rulers of Sri Lanka, and treated their king and queen harshly.

However, once they had conquered a country, the Cholas tried to set up a sound system of administration in it. One of the remarkable features of the Chola administration was their encouragement to local self government in the villages all over their empire. It actually enriched their political power to some extent. They created a strong administrative network to control each and every part of the empire. The Chola state included area of central control, and loosely administered areas under different types of local control. The state was interspersed with hill people and tribals. The basic unit of administration was the nadu which consisted of a number of villages having close kinship ties and other close associations. The number of nadus increased as fresh lands were brought under cultivation by means of irrigation works such as ponds, wells, etc., and by converting hill or tribal people into agriculturists. Grants to Brahmans and temples increased, both of which helped in expanding cultivation. In the Chola kingdom, nadus were grouped into valanadus. The Chola state was divided into four **mandalams** or provinces. Sometimes, princes of the royal family were appointed governors of provinces. Officials were generally paid by giving them assignments of revenue-bearing lands. The Chola rulers built a network of royal roads which were useful for trade as well as for the movement of the army. Trade and commerce flourished in the Chola empire, and there were some gigantic trade guilds which traded with Java and Sumatra. There appears to be little doubt that the Cholas were aggressively following a policy of promotion of trade and it has been argued that the numerous naval expeditions undertaken by them into Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and China may be attributed to the commercial potential of the area. While analyzing the Chola Empire R.Chakravarti assumed that the early Cholas focused on the internal revenue & the imperial Cholas were influenced by the pull of the coast. So the expansion of the Chola empire can also be judged economically.

Although Land revenue was the main source of income for the state and the entire taxation system was organized to harness this in various ways. We hear of assessment of land in terms of the cropping pattern – orupuvilaiyum nilam or one-crop lands, andirupuvilaiyum nilam

or two-crop lands; nir nilam or wet lands; punjey or dry/wastelands; and nanjey or improved lands . Essentially there were two tiers of revenue extraction – local and supra-local. The most pervasive tax was that levied on the cultivator – kutimai. Among the local taxes there were various kinds of labor dues, the most common being irrigational labor – vetti/vettinai – at the village and nadu levels. There was a general tax called natacci/uracci referring to the taxes on residential spaces and commons. There were a number of trading and artisanal dues as well, such as cunkam or toll, tattar pattam or tax on goldsmiths, ennai irai/urai nali on oil, kurai kacu on cloth, verrilai on betel leaf, vannar parai on washermen, paci pattam on fishing, and so on. What is interesting to note is that most were specified to be paid in kind.

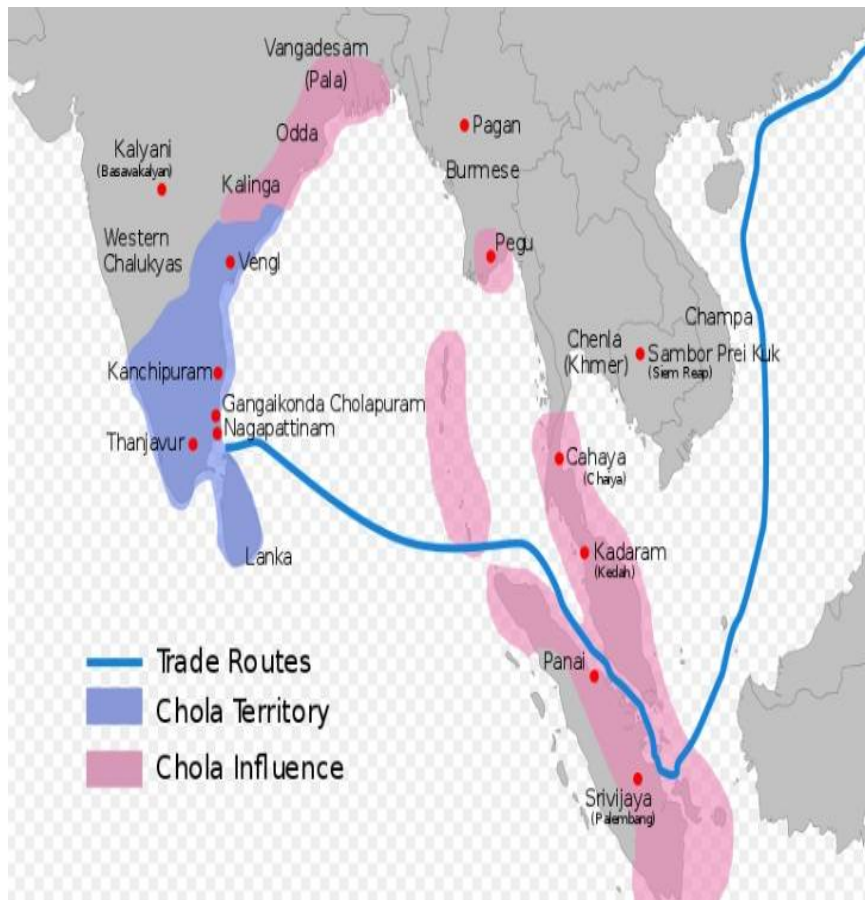
The Chola empire continued to flourish during the twelfth century, but it declined during the early part of the thirteenth century. The later Chalukyan empire in the Maharashtra area had also come to an end during the twelfth century. The place of the Cholas was taken by the Pandyas and the Hoysalas in the south, and the later Chalukyas were replaced by the Yadavas and the Kakatiyas. All these states extended patronage to arts and architecture. Unfortunately, they weakened themselves by continually fighting against each other, sacking the towns and not even sparing the temples. Ultimately, they were destroyed by the sultans of Delhi at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The last known ruler of this dynasty was Rajendra III who was defeated in 1279 by the Pandyan king Maravarman Kulasekara.

The Cholas, under Rajaraja Chola III and later, his successor Rajendra Chola III, were quite weak and therefore, experienced continuous trouble. One feudatory, the Kadava chieftain Kopperunchinga I, even held Rajaraja Chola III as hostage for sometime. At the close of the 12th century, the growing influence of the Hoysalas replaced the declining Chalukyas as the main player in the Kannada country, but they too faced constant trouble from the Seunas and the Kalachuris, who were occupying Chalukya capital because those empires were their new rivals. So naturally, the Hoysalas found it convenient to have friendly relations with the Cholas from the time of Kulothunga Chola III, who had defeated Hoysala Veera Ballala II, who had subsequent marital relations with the Chola monarch. This continued during the time of Rajaraja Chola III the son and successor of Kulothunga Chola III

The Hoysalas played a divisive role in the politics of the Tamil country during this period. They thoroughly exploited the lack of unity among the Tamil kingdoms and alternately supported one Tamil kingdom against the other thereby preventing both the Cholas and Pandyas from rising to their full potential. During the period of Rajaraja III, the Hoysalas sided with the Cholas and defeated the Kadava chieftain Kopperunjinga and the Pandyas and established a presence in the Tamil country. Rajendra Chola III who succeeded Rajaraja III was a much better ruler who took bold steps to revive the Chola fortunes. He led successful expeditions to the north as attested by his epigraphs found as far as Cuddappah. He also defeated two Pandya princes one of whom was Maravarman Sundara Pandya II and briefly made the Pandyas submit to the Chola overlordship. The Hoysalas, under Vira Someswara, were quick to intervene and this time they sided with the Pandyas and repulsed the Cholas in order to counter the latter's revival. The Pandyas in the south had risen to the rank of a great power who ultimately banished the Hoysalas from Malanadu or Kannada country, who were allies of the Cholas from Tamil country and the demise of the Cholas themselves ultimately was caused by the Pandyas in 1279. The Pandyas first steadily gained control of the Tamil country as well as territories in Sri Lanka, Chera country, Telugu country under Maravarman Sundara Pandiyana II and his able

successor Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan before inflicting several defeats on the joint forces of the Cholas under Rajaraja Chola III, and the Hoysalas under Someshwara, his son Ramanatha The Pandyan gradually became major players in the Tamil country from 1215 and intelligently consolidated their position in Madurai-Rameswaram-Ilam-Cheranadu and Kanyakumari belt, and had been steadily increasing their territories in the Kaveri belt between Dindigul-Tiruchy-Karur-Satyamangalam as well as in the Kaveri Delta i.e., Thanjavur-Mayuram-Chidambaram-Vriddhachalam-Kanchi, finally marching all the way up to Arcot—Tirumalai-Nellore-Visayawadai-Vengi-Kalingam belt by 1250.

The Pandyas steadily routed both the Hoysalas and the Cholas. They also dispossessed the Hoysalas, by defeating them under Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan at Kannanur Kuppam. At



the close of Rajendra's reign, the Pandyan empire was at the height of prosperity and had taken the place of the Chola empire in the eyes of the foreign observers. The last recorded date of Rajendra III is 1279. There is no evidence that Rajendra was followed immediately by another Chola prince. The Hoysalas were routed from Kannanur Kuppam around 1279 by Kulasekhara Pandyan and in the same war the last Chola emperor Rajendra III was routed and the Chola empire ceased to exist thereafter. Thus the Chola empire was completely overshadowed by the Pandyan empire and sank into obscurity and ceased to exist by the end

of the 13th century. However, only the Chola dynasty in India was extinguished but it survived elsewhere. According to Cebuano oral legends, a rebel branch of the Chola dynasty continued to survive in the Philippines up until the 16th Century, a local Malayo-Tamil Indianized kingdom called the Rajahnate of Cebu which settled in the island of Cebu which was founded by Rajamuda Sri Lumay who was half Tamil, half Malay. He was born in the previously Chola occupied Srivijaya. He was sent by the Maharajah to establish a base for expeditionary forces, but he rebelled and established his own independent Rajahnate.

While mentioning the importance of Chola empire Rakesh Mahalakshmi mentioned that early historiography of the Cholas focused on its grandeur, comparing it to the Byzantine

Empire, while emphasizing the democratic structures in the form of elected representation in village assemblies. The first systematic effort to study the political economy of the Cholas was through a statistical analysis of the pattern of landholding in brahmana and non-brahmana villages in the early Chola period which had implications for the changes heralded by the royal creation of the brahmadeya in rural society. Another groundbreaking work focusing on the political geography of the Cholas established that the state created new agrarian pockets, renamed old ones, and was constantly redefining its political boundaries. Some scholars have argued that the period marked by Chola rule represented a feudal social formation. A very important study on the Cholas focused on the issue of ritual sovereignty, where ideological mechanisms primarily drawing from religions were seen as the main props of the state. Countering this claim that the state had no real power as well as the feudalism proponents, scholars have stressed the many institutional apparatuses created by the Chola state to establish and maintain itself as a centralized entity. Recent studies have questioned the assumption of Chola colonization of Southeast Asia by focusing on the maritime trading networks from China to the Arab world as the key to understanding this interaction. Works that have focused on religious traditions and transformations of the cultural landscape of the Tamil region draw attention to the ideological institutions used by the state to further its reach and maintain its power. Conventional histories have tended to focus on the decline of the Cholas because of weak rulers in the late 12th century. Actually we have to understand to the political economy on the one hand, and on the other to the rise of additional regional powers such as the Hoysalas and Kakatiyas the northwest and northeast, and the Pandyas in the south to situate the rise of Chola in the Indian as well as Asian history.

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